JOHN CREASEY

Murder, London—New York

Copyright Note

This e-book was created by ***papachanjo***, with the purpose of providing a digitized format of the books written by John Creasey without the least intention of commercial gain of any sort. This e-book should hence be utilized for reading only and if you like it and can buy it, please do to support the publishers.

I am trying to create at least an ample collection of all the John Creasey books which are in the excess of 500 novels. Having read and possess just a meager 10 of his books does not qualify me to be a fan but the 10 I read were enough for me to rake up some effort to scan and create these e-books.

If you happen to have any John Creasey book and would like to add to the free online collection which I'm hoping to bring together, you can do the following:

Scan the book in greyscale

Save as djvu - use the free DJVU SOLO software to compress the images

Send it to my e-mail: papachanjo@rocketmail.com

I'll do the rest and will add a note of credit in the finished document.

from back cover

London
A beautiful girl is found dead — her face slashed

New York
An old man brutally killed the same way

Murder, London—New York
Two parallel crimes, and 'Handsome West' of Scotland Yard and Lieutenant Goodison of New York's Homicide Branch are pitted against each other in an exciting race to unmask the vicious killer.

Table of Contents

Copyright Note

I

2

3

4

5

6

Part II

7

8

9

Part III

10

11

12

13

14

Part IV

15

16

Part V

17

18

19

I

NEW JOB

"HANDSOME," TURNBULL said, from the door of the Chief Inspector's office.

Roger West turned his head from a desk near the window.

"What is it?"

"Spare a minute?"

"Half a mo'," Roger said, and scribbled a note on a typewritten request from the Commander of the Criminal Investigation Department. There had been a time when he had dealt direct with the Assistant Commissioner, but changes in personnel and in rankings had altered all that.

Roger passed four other desks on his way to the door. Turnbull was massive and rugged, ten years the junior, handsome as a lion; they were the two best-looking men at New Scotland Yard. They respected each other but were not close friends. With Turnbull, Roger West always made sure he said and did the correct thing; Turnbull looked thick-skinned but could be very touchy, especially of late, for he was having trouble at home. This was partly because of his arrogance, for his wife could not endure his continual attempts at domination. Roger's sympathies were all with Turnbull's wife; it was arrogance which had made Turnbull summon a senior, instead of coming into the office. Almost without realising it, Roger's mood was antagonistic.

They met just outside the door, at one end of a long passage.

"There's a girl just coming along with Naylor," Turnbull said. "Take a look at her, and tell me what you think, will you?"

It was so often like that: he was fully justified in calling Roger. The antagonism Faded into a kind of wariness.

"Who is she?"

"Sister of Margaret Roy."

“Oh,” said Roger, and wariness faded, too. He glanced towards the further corner, where he could hear footsteps. He did not need telling that Turnbull wanted him to see the girl as they passed, without making it obvious. He himself was equally anxious to see her. The Yard had been looking for her for three days, and she had turned up a few hours ago, saying that she had been in the country, away from radio, television, neighbours and newspapers.

How likely was that?

Roger wondered whether she would be remotely like her murdered sister; whether beauty ran in the family, or was just a phenomenon. When Margaret Roy had been found dead, it was as if someone had savaged beauty for savagery’s sake, by slashing that lovely face. It had been a hideous crime. The newspapers had played it low, because somehow it had shocked the tough and the hard-bitten; some said that it had shocked even the profane.

“You seen her?” Roger asked Turnbull.

“Yeh.”

The footsteps were so near now that any moment Chief Superintendent Naylor and Vanity Roy would appear. Naylor’s approach came thump, thump, thump, from a man of seventeen stone; the woman’s tap, tap-tap, as if she was having difficulty in keeping up.

They turned the corner.

Naylor, snuffling, heavy with cold, and in his baggy brown suit, dwarfed the girl. She hardly came to his shoulder, and yet held the attention in such a way that it would be easy to forget Naylor except as a hazy background. Many different adjectives would be used about the girl, elfin, fragile, fey among them; and of course she would be called a pocket Venus. But in spite of her heart-shaped face and the unreal perfection of her skin, brushed as with a bloom of gold, it was her mass of black shiny hair, and the way she walked, that caught and held the attention.

Roger and Turnbull went towards the couple.

The sister of Margaret Roy was used to being looked at, so their gaze wouldn't surprise her at all. She was used to repulsing any kind of come-hither look, too. Chin high, hair glinting even in the dull passage, she would have passed them without a glance had Naylor not said in his cold-thickened voice:

"Oh, Chief Inspector."

The formality was for the girl's benefit.

"Yes, sir?"

"Have you heard how Sergeant Creel is?"

Naylor wasn't interested in Sergeant Creel, who was off duty following an accident met while stopping smash-and- grab thieves from escaping; he was giving Roger a chance to study the girl.

"Yes, sir, I had a message this morning. He's up and about, and should be on duty again at the end of next week."

"That's good," Naylor snuffled.

The girl had stared straight ahead, as if she wanted to thrust these two men into the shadow of her beauty, but that wasn't so easy. It was partly pretended, too, for she glanced at Roger from under those sweeping black eyelashes, and revealed the strange brilliance of her own pearl-grey eyes. She looked away again, as Naylor led her on, while Roger and Turnbull went to the corner and turned round it before Turnbull asked.

"What do you think?"

"She's frightened out of her wits."

"You think so, too," said Turnbull with satisfaction, which was almost smug. "I said so to Naylor, and he as good as told me that I was dreaming it up. But he's not a bad old so-and- so, he agreed to let you have a look at her."

"Why me?"

"Yours was the first name that came to my mind," said Turnbull, half-jeering; he simply couldn't help himself. "So far, all

she's said is that she didn't know that her sister was frightened, didn't know of any enemies, troubles, money- worries, discarded or vindictive lovers and/or vices which might explain the murder. She says she didn't know Maggie was dead until she read a report in the *Morning Globe* which she bought on her way from Dorset this morning. She adds that she didn't even wait to have lunch, she came straight here in sisterly grief and dismay." Turnbull stopped at the head of a flight of stairs. "Talking of lunch, how about a cuppa?"

Thanks, but I can't stay long," Roger said. They clumped down the stairs. "Where's Naylor taking her?"

"He's seeing her to the front hall, and then he'll send her to her flat in a cab. He's agreed to have her followed for a day or so, anyhow. If all the big shots were as good as Naylor this wouldn't be such a bad dog-house. Ought to be in bed with that cold of his. You heard the latest rumour about you yourself?"

"I'm always the last to hear," Roger said drily.

"That superintendency is in the bag."

Roger was surprised into a laugh.

"I've heard that one so often and for so many years, it's like an echo. I don't believe it any more."

They reached the canteen, and Turnbull looked at him almost oddly before saying:

"Calling me a liar?"

"Don't be a fool," Roger said, and saw anger flare up into the other's eyes. Turnbull was far too touchy to do his best work, but he controlled himself now.

"We'll see who's the fool," he said, and went up to the counter. "Two teas and a couple of doughnuts with extra jam. Make it slippy."

There was a kind of swashbuckling air about him, which many people at the Yard had come to like; the half-jeering tone, the grin

on his face, the boldness of his approach to all and sundry, appealed to most Yard men, although there had been a day when they resented it. Roger wondered how much he himself was to blame for the present tensions. His wife knew Turnbull's wife well, and Turnbull probably realised that he, Roger, knew about the troubles at home.

Another Chief Inspector arrived and started to talk about dead Maggie and living Vanity Roy, marvelling:

"Why would anyone want to christen her Vanity?"

"Ma or Pa probably had a crush on Thackeray," Turnbull said, and then an elderly constable came in, one of the messengers, and made a bee-line for Roger. The Commander wants to see you, Mr West, he says will you drop everything and hurry?"

The tea was being thrust into Roger's hand.

"Coming," he said, and sipped. It was very hot, and he put it down, while the man at the counter splashed in more milk. "Thanks," said Roger, and within half a minute he was out of the canteen.

"The way that man moves," marvelled the other CI. "You'd think he lived for his work, wouldn't you?"

"And he does," said Turnbull, without any sign of a jeer. "Every time I see Handsome West he teaches me something, even if I don't want it. This time he's teaching me how to eat two doughnuts when I only wanted one." He picked up the plate.

"Queer thing about his promotion," the CI remarked. "He was on the list years ago. I know he blotted his copybook when old Jay was Assistant Commissioner, but you wouldn't think the new chap or Hardy would hold it against him, would you?"

"If you ask me," Turnbull said, "he's had it too easy."

By that time, Roger was approaching the Commander's office, and slackening speed a little. The years and his own enthusiasm had taught him that in some jobs even minutes counted; the

Commander might want him for one of these. Speculation wouldn't help much, but the only case vivid in his thoughts was that of the Margaret Roy murder. Except for that, crime had been humdrum recently; it often was in midsummer.

He tapped at the door, and Commander Hardy himself called: "Come in." It was a big office, with two desks; Hardy was at one, his *aide*, Chief Inspector Bill Sloan and an old crony of Roger's, was on the telephone. Hardy was lean, wiry, tall, a military type who had worked his way up from the uniformed branch by sheer ability, but he was an administrator as much as a detective. Sloan didn't greatly like his present job because it kept him indoors; but it also helped to swell his pay packet, and he had a growing family. Sloan waved a hand, and there was a look in his eyes which Roger knew well: he was bursting with news.

"Hallo, Handsome," Hardy said. "You're not over busy at the moment, are you?"

"No."

"Well, Dick Naylor's got a filthy cold and he keeps getting sneezing bouts, so he's going off duty. I want you to take over the Roy investigation."

Eagerness showed in Roger's eyes, and Hardy grinned.

"I didn't think you'd complain," he said. "Go right along and talk to Naylor, will you, and try not to catch his stinker. We'll have half the Yard down with summer "flu if we're not careful. Turnbull's been working with him, he'll be able to brief you."

"Any special angle you want me to follow?" asked Roger.

"Not yet. Turnbull says he thinks that the sister is lying, because she's scared. Get in touch with the Dorset people, they'll help all they can. Don't let Turnbull start ordering them about, though, or telling them how bad provincial coppers are." Hardy knew Turnbull's great weakness; of annoying people he was dealing with for the first time. "Pass everything else on, as necessary, and

let me know what you think when you've had a good look at the job."

"Right," said Roger. "Thanks."

Sloan was taking down notes, still with the telephone at one ear, still looking as if he were bursting with news. Probably that meant he wished he could have told Roger of this himself; but he had no chance.

Roger hurried out.

It was Turnbull's remark about the superintendency which made him reflect wryly that he'd been given another Superintendent's job without having the rank. He was used to that. Some of his friends were sore, his wife was sore, his two sons thought it the height of unfairness and ingratitude, but he himself just took it for granted that when he had defied an Assistant Commissioner on an investigation, he had marked himself as a rebel; he'd asked for it and got it.

To get to Naylor's office, he had to pass his own, so he went in to check if anything new had come in, needing immediate action. There were a few memos and a sealed note, the kind that came from the secretary's office about holidays, social events, hours of duty and the divers matters which were as relevant to the Yard as to a big business. Eddie Day, the Yard's expert on forgery, another man who had been passed over for promotion, and who would retire soon with a CI's pay, looked up from his desk. In recent months, Eddie had become almost sour.

"What are you looking so pleased wiv' yourself about?" he demanded.

"Hardy's given me the Roy job."

"That's a n'eadache, that is," Eddie observed, with a kind of melancholy satisfaction. "You'll come a cropper over that one, 'Andsome. I can smell 'em. That's trouble, that is. Killer without a motive. I don't envy you."

“Don’t blame you.” Roger scribbled notes on the memos. “Be a pal, Eddie, and get one of the sergeants to come in and look after these oddments. Might cast an eye over them yourself if you’ve time.” He picked up the sealed envelope, and his telephone bell rang. With a curiously easy yet swift movement he picked the instrument up; he did everything with a kind of rhythmic briskness, and as he looked out of the window into the courtyard below, his expression was eager, and his film star handsomeness quite remarkable. His fair hair was a little ruffled; almost boyish.

“West here.”

“It’s Detective Officer Anderson, sir. I wanted to report to Mr Naylor, but he’s not in his office, and I’m told you’re handling the Roy case.”

That was quick.

“That’s right.”

“I was detailed to follow Miss Vanity Roy, sir, in a taxi. I regret to report that I’ve lost her. Mr Naylor said if she should give me the slip he wanted to know at once.”

“Did she give you the slip, or did you fall down on the job?” Roger was crisp.

“I think she meant to evade me, sir,” answered Anderson very carefully, “but I’m not sure.”

“Fair enough,” said Roger. “All right, thanks. Come and see me as soon as you’re back, will you?” He replaced the receiver and dropped the envelope on the desk, while Eddie Day watched him. Roger let his thoughts jostle one another. He could refer to Hardy and ask if a call ought to be sent out for Vanity Roy, or he could put one out without asking. That was the trouble with his rank; a superintendent had all the necessary authority, but a CI with hopes for promotion had to watch the regulations. He lifted the telephone and asked for Hardy.

“He’s not in his office, sir, and Mr Sloan’s on the telephone,”

the operator told him.

"Then give me Information," Roger said, and was put through at once. "That you, Fred . . . We've lost Vanity Roy, and I'd like to find out where she is as soon as I can, don't want any more slashing jobs. Don't pick her up, but ask all Divisions to keep an eye open for her, will you?"

"Right," said the Information Room CI. "How's it feel, Handsome?"

"I feel all right," Roger said. He wasn't really thinking of the question, he was wondering whether it would be wise to see Turnbull before Naylor, see them both together, or see Naylor first.

"Well, you're pretty calm about it," the CI said. "I — I'll be seeing you, Hardy's just poked his nose in."

Roger put the receiver down.

The years had taught him to disregard the irrelevant and to concentrate on the essentials — and now the essential was the Roy case. He had a mental picture of that perfect little beauty, with her black hair, peach-bloom skin and pearl- grey eyes; he had never seen anyone with eyes quite like it. And he had another picture, of her sister, dead, with her face slashed.

Had Vanity Roy given Anderson the slip, or had the DO been more honest than competent?

"I'll see Naylor first," Roger decided, and nodded to Eddie and hurried out. Naylor's office was only just round the corner; he shared it with a Chief Inspector who did most of his chores for him; another difference between one rank and another. As he opened the door, Roger heard a tremendous sneeze, then a hearty blow, then a hoarse:

"Couple've days in bed, that's what I want. Oh, it's you, Handsome. Come in." Naylor thrust his handkerchief into his pocket as he looked at Roger with reddened, watery eyes, and unexpectedly stood up and thrust out his hand. "Don't suppose I'm

the first, but congratulations," he said.

Roger looked blank.

"Thanks, but what about?"

"Come off it." Naylor's big hand gripped his tightly. "I suppose the truth is you've been playing superintendent for so long you don't feel any different now you are one."

2

Where is Vanity?

AFTER THE first moment of unbelief, Roger knew that it was true. Fie had really been promoted. No one had told him, so there must have been some delay in the official notification, but there were too many pointers for doubt. Turnbull's certainty, the fact that he'd been given Naylor's job, instead of being told to work with Naylor, the Information Room man's "How's it feel, Handsome?" Now this. He must have seemed the most blasé man at the Yard.

Naylor burst into a deep laugh, which soon became a wheeze and grew into a splutter. He sat down, and gasped:

"So you didn't — why, everyone at the Yard knows, Handsome! It came through just after lunch. Do you really mean to say —" he tried to laugh again and this time it became a spluttering cough.

That gave Roger the brief respite he needed.

His first reaction was one of overwhelming delight. He had not fully realised how deeply he longed for a superintendency, how firmly he had kept his feelings under control, how fixedly he had told himself that he couldn't expect it for a long time yet. Now here it was, and he had been running around in complete ignorance. That was worth plenty of laughs. He chuckled, as Naylor's office *aide* rounded his desk and said:

"Congratulations, Handsome, better late than never."

"It certainly caught me napping," Roger said, and squeezed this hand much more tightly than he had Naylor's. Inconsequent thoughts danced through his mind. Delight at home; several hundred pounds a year rise; his own office; much more authority, much more responsibility. He turned back to Naylor, grinning broadly. Naylor had stifled a sneeze, and had a hand in his pocket, as if preparing to grab the handkerchief. In front of him was a slim

file of papers, and there was little doubt that these covered the Margaret Roy case; there would be reports from the departments, all available evidence, photographs, medical reports, plans for the inquest, and details of all that had been done, including the search for the sister, Vanity Roy.

Had she deliberately dodged Anderson?

The question seemed to ask itself, and as it did so, exuberance and excitement both faded. They seemed to be replaced by a kind of buoyancy, and were no longer on top of his mind; the brief moment of elation was past.

"Vanity Roy dodged Anderson," he told Naylor.

"Charley just told me," said Naylor. "Not sure whether that chap's going to be a good copper or not, we'll have to see. Got a call out for her?"

"Report call."

"Didn't lose any time, then," said Naylor. "Well, there isn't much I can add to this lot." He slapped a big, red hand on the file of papers. "Not that there's much there, never known a job with so few pointers. We haven't made a break through anywhere — hardly made a scratch. Here's a business-cum- society woman, got everything she wants, could marry almost anyone she wanted, spends half her time in England, the other half in America or Europe. She's partner in a big firm of picture dealers, might be an angle there. Is reputed to be very generous, has no known enemies, everyone loves her. I know I sound corny, Handsome," Naylor digressed, "but let me tell you something you know already: when we're dealing with a beautiful woman like this we usually find someone who is prepared to dig into her memory, and pull something out. A maid, servant of some kind, a past boy friend, tradespeople, poor relations — someone always comes across with a story which doesn't stand in with the others, but not in this case. She's been dead three days, the inquest is tomorrow, and we

haven't a single person with a bad word for her — or for her sister, either. How about that?"

"Nice to know there are some angels left," Roger remarked. "What about this picture business?"

"Old established, wealthy, run by two cousins — it's all in the report. Turnbull knows as much as I do — more, probably, I've never been able to cure that chap of keeping things to himself, he seems to think he's inspired. Make sure he doesn't try to solve this one by himself, Handsome; he'll act as if he ought to have been put in charge, as he knows so much about it. He's been a sour devil for weeks, as it is. Probably thinks he ought to have had promotion sooner."

Here was further evidence that Turnbull might be awkward to work with.

"One thing, you know him better than most of us," Naylor went on. He drew in his breath as if about to have another fit of sneezing, but recovered. "I don't want to be a Jonah, but there's another thing I'm not happy about on this job — Turn- bull's roving eye. He's too liable to look at a nice ankle instead of the face. I told Hardy as much. Hardy decided to make him a CI, and thought he might take this job over, but I advised him against it. If I were you, I'd keep Turnbull off the Vanity Roy search, and find him some other angle."

Doing that would virtually tell Turnbull that he'd been passed over, and it might make him vicious, Roger mused. But he was landed with the man, now — as he had been once before, when Turnbull might have been thrown out of the Yard but for Roger's intervention.

Would that old debt still count?

"I'll keep him off Vanity Roy," Roger told Naylor. The problem of Turnbull seemed insignificant compared with his own great news. "Can I take that file?"

"Take nothing," Naylor said. "You're working in this office for a day or two, until they find you one of your own. No room in this place, that's the trouble. I'm taking a week off, I've got it coming to me, so there should be time to get you fixed up. I've cleared the two top side drawers for you."

"Fine," said Roger. "Thanks a lot." He felt ridiculously as if he were stepping into another man's shoes. "I ought to nip back to my own office first. Hope you soon shake that cold off."

"If I were you I'd dose myself with some of those cold capsules," Naylor said. "I usually do."

Charlie chuckled, Roger grinned and went out, closing the door as Naylor realized that he wasn't much of an advertisement for any brand of cold capsules.

Roger stood outside the door for a moment. He needed a few minutes by himself to absorb this development, to accept it as true, to realize that the dream wasn't a dream any longer. He was the youngest superintendent here by five years, just as he had been the youngest chief inspector. It was a damned shame that he couldn't go straight to the desk and spend half an hour telephoning; to Janet for instance. He *must* call Janet, and might not have much, time later in the day. He hurried to his office, and it wasn't until he was at the desk that he realized it wasn't his any longer, for Eddie Day was standing up, a man with a huge paunch which made him look short, a receding chin, and discoloured teeth which protruded a little.

"Congrats, Handsome," he said, and it was obvious that he had rehearsed this very carefully. "Couldn't be much more pleased if it had been myself."

"Thanks, Eddie. Your turn will come."

"Not now it won't, I'm past fifty-five," said Eddie, "but that don't make any difference to feeling pleased about you." Then he became anxious and urgent. "When are you moving out, by the

way? I've always wanted that desk in the window, if you're going to move right away, I might as well stake my claim."

"It's your desk, Eddie! Let's put yours where mine is, that'll save a lot of trouble, and if they send another man in here right away, you'll be safe." Roger went to his desk as Eddie followed, still eager, and saw the sealed envelope. "Good Lord!" He ripped the envelope open, and read the brief announcement, from the Secretary, that he" had been promoted to the rank of Superintendent, the promotion to be retrospective, where salary was concerned, to April 1st. There was also a polite note of congratulation.

Some messenger had delayed, and Hardy and others must have wondered why Roger had made no comment. Why hadn't Hardy? It certainly explained why Sloan had been bursting with news.

They changed the position of the desks, shifting telephones, moving oddments. By the time they had finished, Eddie was badly out of breath. Roger picked up a telephone, said: "It's West here, get me my wife, will you?" and rang off. He picked up another telephone, and said: "Information, please . . . Hallo, Fred, I've only just had my official note. You knew before I did . . . Thanks a lot! . . . Anything in about Vanity Roy? . . . The moment anything comes, let me know, will you? I'll be in Naylor's office. Thanks, old chap." He rang off, looked at the other telephone, and wished it would ring. It didn't. Then the door opened, and Turnbull came in.

"Believe me now?" he demanded.

This was a moment to be generous.

"You had it right," Roger admitted, and smiled. "I hear I've got to congratulate you."

"How about being practical, and giving me your desk?" Turnbull demanded. His manner made it almost certain that he thought he should be in charge of the Roy case.

“I’ve been after that desk for years,” Eddie protested indignantly. There was a risk that Turnbull would really lose his temper; and Day was obviously prepared to fight for his rights.

Then Turnbull seemed to relax, and became positively hearty.

“The oldest inhabitant has first claim, okay, but don’t forget my name’s on it. That right you’re working in Naylor’s office, Handsome?”

“Yes.”

“Right that Vanity’s vanished?”

“Yes.”

“Someone could have told me. If I had the authority, I’d put Anderson back on the beat,” said Turnbull. “That’s the third job he’s mucked up in the past three weeks. Know what his trouble is?” Turnbull’s smile was positively fierce. “Takes after me too much. He likes a pretty face and a bouncy bosom. Suppose you haven’t had much time to think over the slasher job, Superintendent.”

“Not much,” Roger agreed, “but there’s an angle I think we ought to work up pretty quickly.”

“Job for me?” Turnbull demanded, and gave the fierce grin.

“Yes,” Roger answered. “Work on Margaret Roy’s overseas contacts, where she stayed in New York, Paris, and the Riviera, for instance, what crowd she mixed with, whether she did much gambling, how much business she did for the Old World Gallery. Let’s have a list of all the people and places she’s visited outside England. There hasn’t been time to get it ready yet, but we need it in case we draw a blank from her home base.”

Turnbull seemed completely deflated, his fierce grin fading, his big body sagging. His voice was unexpectedly flat as he said:

“Right. I’ll get busy.”

He turned and went out, without glancing round.

“What did you say to upset him, Handsome?” Eddie Day inquired, with deep interest.

Roger answered mildly: “I fancy he was working on the overseas angle himself, and getting it ready to throw at us when we’d beaten our heads against the nearest brick wall.”

That answer would satisfy Eddie, anyhow.

The telephone bell rang, and Roger snatched it up. This would be Janet, and on the thought Turnbull vanished from his mind.

An operator said: “I’m sorry, Mr West, there’s no reply from your home. Shall I keep the call in?”

Roger covered his disappointment. “Yes, and put it through to Mr Naylor’s office, please.”

The girl’s voice rose from its formal level: “Yes, Superintendent.”

Roger laughed. “Thanks.”

“Everyone’s very pleased, Mr West.”

“I’m not exactly annoyed about it myself,” said Roger. He rang off, lit a cigarette, and reminded himself that it would be easy to go about being patted on the back and shaking hands with well wishers, whereas Turnbull’s attitude was probably better for him; it would needle him into finding Margaret Roy’s killer quickly. One essential thing was to make sure that Turnbull wasn’t keeping vital facts to himself. Another, to find out whether Naylor had asked the Dorset police to check that Vanity Roy had been where she said she had for the past three days.

Why had she hidden herself away?

Naylor had gone from his office, only the telephones and the file were on his desk. Roger nodded to Charlie, who would probably spend half of his life on the telephone, sat down, and opened the Roy file. He had to get inside this case, had to get to know the murdered woman, her friends, her enemies, her relations, her life; he couldn’t be sure, but he had the detective’s almost natural aversion to assuming that hers had been a senseless killing.

If it was a psychopathic job, then look out for the next victim.

Frightened, pearl-grey eyes might mean little, but might mean that missing Vanity Roy wondered whether she would be next on the list.

"Now I'm letting my imagination run away with me," Roger said, and turned over a document, and came upon a photograph of Vanity's sister, taken after death.

It became overwhelmingly important to find Vanity Roy.

His telephone bell rang.

"I've got your wife on the line, Superintendent," the operator said.

"Fine! Put her through!"

This was a great moment. . . .

* * *

Janet West, standing by the telephone in the front room of their house in Chelsea, waited for Roger and assumed that he was going to warn her that he would be late tonight; she was resigned to it. Then he came on :

"Mrs Superintendent West?" he boomed.

Mrs Super. . . .

"Darling!" Her whole face lit up. "Really?"

"Absolutely, and confirmed in black and white."

"How *wonderful*!" Janet said, and then realised that if she wasn't careful she would start to cry; it had seemed so long in coming. "Darling, I can't — can't believe it. The boys will be thrilled, there'll be no holding them. . . ."

She would have gone on talking for a long time, but Roger interrupted after a minute or two:

"Turnbull's been stepped up, too," he said. "Oh," said Janet, stopped in midstream. "Well, I hope this makes him easier to live with at home. But never mind *him,* darling. . . ."

When Roger rang off, Turnbull was very much on his mind, however; domestic trouble could warp a man's judgement, and if

Turnbull made a serious mistake so soon after promotion, it might jeopardise his whole future.

There was going to be more to this job than finding a murderer. And one of the first things he wanted was a talk with Vanity Roy. He hoped to God she was all right.

3

Fear

"DON'T GET yourself involved at all," Jimmy had said. "There's no need to. Michael and I can handle them. There's no need to drag you through the mud."

Vanity Roy had replied:

"If I thought there was a thing I could do, I'd go to the police at once."

"There simply isn't a thing," Jimmy had insisted.

It hadn't occurred to her then, as it had during the three days at the cottage, that either Jimmy or Michael, or perhaps the pair of them together, might have killed Margaret. Cousins with whom you had been brought up, childhood's bosom friends, companions through adolescence whom one liked, loved and trusted, could not be murderers; they had simply been put in danger, because of Maggie's murder. That was how it had seemed at the time. When Jimmy had suggested that she should go down to the cottage, pretending that she knew nothing about the murder, so that she could avoid the worst of the early days of the investigation, she had been very glad to go. She had never liked facing unpleasant things, would hate being questioned by the police, and hate being forced to see Maggie's body, and her poor, disfigured face.

So she had gone away.

It had been all right on the journey down, and even on the first night alone, for she had not really believed it; she hadn't seen Maggie, had only been told that she was dead.

"Just stay there for a few days, and we'll look after everything," Jimmy had said, and Vanity could remember the pressure of his fingers on her arm. "It'll be all right once the inquest is over. You've always hated funerals, and you'd hate this one more than ever."

“But how shall I explain where I was?”

“You’ve often gone down to Lynn for a few days with your books and your typewriter, this won’t be unusual. And you can say the radio broke down. I expect it has, anyhow, the battery probably needs replacing. You’ve the gramophone for company, there won’t be anything strange about it. There’s absolutely no need for you to go through purgatory, Van. It would be different if there was any way you could help.”

Tall, friendly, reliable, trustworthy Jimmy, with his prematurely grey hair and his persuasive eyes; she had always liked Jimmy better than Michael.

“And if you get off now, before you go to Maggie’s flat, no one will be surprised,” he had added. “You can stay for three or four days until the police find you, and then the worst will be over.”

Everything he had said had made sense, and she had taken the train from Waterloo to Weymouth, then gone by bus to Lynn, all quite openly. She had arrived when it was nearly dark, and been glad of the comfort of the little cottage, with the rustle of the waves on the pebble beach not far away, and the lullaby of the wind. Being familiar with the cottage had been a comfort too, and perhaps that and the fact that she had been so tired had taken her through the first night. She had slept well.

Then her doubts had been born.

Why had Jimmy been so anxious to get rid of her? Why had he and Michael planned this between them, sending her to the cottage which Jimmy had bought, years ago, for a quiet retreat from London? Why had she allowed herself to be persuaded? At least she knew the answer to that one: she had lacked moral courage all her life. Even at twenty-four, one could not change a lifetime’s habits very easily. Being on her own, with only the gramophone records for company, and an old machine which needed winding up for every record, had helped her to sec vividly

that she should not have left London; that here was one of the reasons for hating herself. At first she had fought against believing that Maggie had been killed, then she had developed an overwhelming need to know more about it, and had turned on the radio at news time, getting a faint volume from the nearly-flat battery, and hearing confirmation that Margaret had been found, murdered, in her own room. She had been dead in that room all the morning, until Jimmy and Michael — they had told Vanity — had been puzzled because she had not answered the telephone, and had gone to see her.

Jimmy had found her; dead.

Within half an hour, he had telephoned Vanity to say that he was coming over at once, and Vanity had waited for him.

The third day at the cottage had been even worse, for the radio had faded completely, and she had been desperate for news. Then she had been lucky. Walking across the moorland between the cottage and the cliffs to a favourite picnic spot, she had found part of the morning's newspaper on the ground, where someone had sat on it as protection against the wet grass. She had seen Maggie's photograph, read the whole dreadful story, and learned that the police were anxious to interview her. Jimmy and Michael had been mentioned several times, and Jimmy had been quoted as saying that he had no idea where Vanity was. The newspaper had seized on that with a great headline:

IS VANITY ROY ALIVE? Do the police suspect that Vanity Roy is the second victim of the slasher who killed her beautiful sister in dead of night. . . .

She would have returned to London that day, but had missed the only afternoon train. So she had caught the early train next morning, reached London soon after ten o'clock, and gone straight to Scotland Yard. The man who had first interviewed her had been big and bold-looking, almost the wolf type, although nothing he

had said or done suggested that: a gleam in the eye was the same all the world over. Then she had seen the big, elderly man with the heavy cold, who had listened to her story and seemed to believe it, and also to believe her when she said that she felt she owed it to Maggie to give all the assistance she could.

In fact, she felt in some compelling way that she owed it to Maggie to help find her murderer — whoever that was.

Now she was in the taxi, still wondering whether she knew the real reason why Jimmy and Michael had persuaded her to go to Lynn. Had it been just because they had wanted to shield her?

The taxi was following her, but at a traffic block in Regent Street, two drivers had cut in and separated hers from the pursuing taxi. She had paid her driver through the window, and got out; and as she had reached the pavement the traffic had started to move, and apparently the man following had not noticed her.

It was very warm in London, and the smell of petrol fumes was thick and unpleasant after the country; London was always a disappointment for the first day back, but on the second it began to spread its arms and take hold of her. She wasn't thinking of London then, but crossed the road and then went down a subway to Piccadilly Station, with its shops and air of bustle, the continual stream of people going to and from the escalators, the patient ticket collectors. She went to a telephone kiosk, and called Jimmy's number. She saw two people come up and then look impatient because no other box was free, while she held on. Jimmy was out, of course, the ringing sound was going on and on, and the couple were staring as if willing her to put the receiver down and come away.

The ringing sound stopped, there was a clatter of noise, and then Jimmy said breathlessly:

"Hallo, who's that?"

"Jimmy. . . ."

"Van!"

"Jimmy, I'm back. I couldn't stay down there any longer. I've been to the police."

"Van, but *why?"* He was still breathless, and he sounded sharply disapproving, as if blaming her for some grave offence. "You were out of everything down there."

"I had to."

"Well, you can't blame anyone but yourself."

"I don't want to blame anyone else. Jimmy, I must see you."

"I'm absolutely tied up this afternoon, Van, but I'll get away as soon as I can. How about six o'clock? I could meet —"

"I can't wait until six o'clock." Vanity was hurriedly emphatic. "I've just got to talk to you or Michael. I've been on my own too long, if I don't talk to someone I'll go mad."

"Now don't be ridiculous, Van." Jimmy could be more uncle than cousin, and the stern disciplinarian of the family when necessary. "I'm sorry if it was the wrong thing to do, but we did it for your sake, you know. Have you still a key to the flat?"

"Yes."

"All right, come straight here," Jimmy said. "I'll be back as soon as I can. And I'll call Michael and ask him to come too — one of us will be there by five at the latest."

That was better.

"All right, Jimmy, thanks. I'm sorry."

"Van, what did they ask you?"

"Who — oh, the police? They just asked me where I'd been and why I hadn't been to see them before."

"Did you tell them what we agreed you would say?"

"Yes."

"That's good. Now get over to the flat and make yourself a cup of tea. If anyone rings the bell or knocks on the door, I shouldn't answer. Reporters have been worrying us ever since the

body was discovered. There weren't any there this afternoon when I came back, so they might have given up. Can't be sure, though."

"I won't talk to anyone."

"I'm sure you won't," said Jimmy. "Now don't worry at all, pet. The worst is over by now."

He rang off.

The couple had disappeared, and Vanity saw them squeezed together in another telephone box. She put her receiver down slowly, and a man hurried forward, as if afraid that he would be beaten at the door. She went slowly towards the Shaftesbury Avenue steps, jostled by a crowd of women shoppers, all heavily laden. She quickened her pace and reached the street. The Circus, now behind her, was crowded with cars and the pavement was thronged, with Eros aiming his arrow pointlessly towards the ground.

It was half-past three, and if Jimmy wasn't going to be at the flat until five o'clock, that meant she would have too much time on her hands, and she didn't want to be alone any longer. Yet here, among the crowds, she felt unutterably lonely. Two policemen passed without giving her a glance; three young men, all jabbering in a foreign language she didn't recognise, glanced and then gaped at her. A tall American, immaculately dressed and the coolest-looking man in sight, was obviously intrigued by her. The only time men didn't stare was when she was with Margaret; then they looked at Margaret first.

Margaret. Oh, Maggie!

How it hurt.

She bought an evening newspaper, and there was a single column headline:

VANITY ROY STILL MISSING

She folded the paper and put it under her arm, then began to walk briskly back the way she had come, then to Leicester Square,

where there were queues of people at one of the cinemas, and where electric light wasted itself on the sunlit day. Soon she was crossing Trafalgar Square, past thousands of pigeons fluttering and squeaking; hundreds of children had their arms stretched out timidly, birds were pecking disdainfully, photographers were clucking their tongues and clicking their fingers to get both bird and child to pose. The fountains were playing, and there was a gentle spray which cooled the air and fell lightly upon Vanity's face. She crossed at the Strand, and then got a Number n bus. She hardly noticed the other passengers. As the bus turned into Whitehall, she saw a man who looked like Michael, tall and dark and glossy-haired, hurrying across the road; it wasn't Michael. There was a flash of colour at the Horse Guards, where two soldiers, disappointingly small, stood motionless on duty. The big buildings on either side might have been miles away, but Big Ben caught her eye and then the Abbey. She looked away; for she had been there at Easter, with Maggie.

A conductress came up, holding out a black hand, the palm almost as pale as Vanity's, and asked in a pleasant husky voice:

"Fare please, ma'am."

"Chelsea Town Hall, please."

"Four pennies, ma'am."

The lights, the crowds, the rhythm of London, the solid squareness of the buildings, the sight of Scotland Yard just down a little side street, did something to ease the burden on Vanity's mind. She told herself that she was suffering from shock and solitude, that when she actually saw Jimmy and Michael she would realise that it was nonsense to have the slightest suspicion. If only they hadn't been so anxious to bundle her away. Yes, she felt much better. She got off at Chelsea Town Hall, and then walked briskly along the narrow streets to the Embankment, not knowing that she passed several policemen, then on the look-out for her, and missed them

only by a few yards. Soon she was in the little crescent of Georgian houses overlooking the Thames, the two bridges near here, the ugly squat mass of the Battersea Power Station on the right of the riverside panorama. She hardly noticed this, or the shimmering of the sunlight on the broad Thames, just then at high tide. She noticed a man standing near one corner of the crescent, but gave him little thought; she didn't recognise him, and he did not approach her. No one was near Number 17, View Crescent, where Jimmy had a top, studio flat. She found the front door open; sometimes it was locked, sometimes a tenant of one of the other flats left it on the latch. Inside, it was dark when she shut the door. The stairs were carpeted, and she made no sound as she went up, passing the two landings before reaching Jimmy's. Here it was brighter, because there was a roof-light over the landing. She opened her bag, took out her keys, selected Jimmy's, and inserted it.

As she opened the door, she heard someone move inside.

So Jimmy was here. She felt a glow of appreciation as she stepped inside and closed the door behind her.

Jimmy didn't appear; perhaps he hadn't heard her.

"I'm here, Jimmy!"

He didn't reply; no one replied. Yet she was sure that she had heard the sound. She stood with her back to the door, staring about the living room, which led to the kitchen and bathroom on one side, the huge studio and the tiny bedroom on the other.

"Jimmy!"

He wouldn't play the fool just now, and nor would Michael. If they weren't here, then who was?

Her heart began to pound. In a flurry of alarm she swung round towards the door, snatching at the latch, to open it. As she did so, she looked over her shoulder.

She saw a man's shadow cast into the room from the studio.

4

Quick Work

As SHE SAW the shadow creeping towards her, Vanity opened the door, and it sagged closer. She stepped to one side and pulled the door wildly, while at a screaming pitch of terror; but she could not scream, no sound at all came from her open mouth. She ran on to the landing, tried to pull the door behind her, but caught her nail on it, that was all. She ran to the top of the stairs and nearly stumbled, clutched the handrail, and then began to sob: “No, no, no.” Her right leg gave way under her, and she fell, clung to the handrail, and turned her head to look over her shoulder, fresh terror welling up. She saw a man, head and shoulders hidden by a scarf worn like a cowl, throwing something at her; and then he turned and disappeared.

The missile struck the wall a few feet away from her, and instinctively, she ducked. There was a sharp, hissing sound, and a great heat on her hands, which covered her face.

Flame was spreading all over the stone staircase — liquid fire, coming towards her. She turned and ran from it, as there came a new sound, a new cause of fear: a man, racing up the stairs. There was the fire on her heels and the man below, and she did not know what to do.

A man she had seen before came into sight at the second floor landing, a big, boyish type, who was coming very fast. He was beckoning her, and she did not understand why. Then:

“Jump!” he shouted. “I’ll catch you. Jump!”

It was the one way she could save herself; and she obeyed.

The man clutched her, and she hardly felt the jolt. Then he carried her downstairs and into the street while other men came, some with fire-extinguishers; and she knew that she was safe.

Soon the fire was out and she was led upstairs over the

blackened steps. Sight of them made her shudder. If the liquid fire had reached her, she would have been burned to death. She did not know how to express her gratitude to the man who rescued her. She had seen him at Scotland Yard as she had walked down the unending flight of stone steps with the big superintendent, and he was the man who had followed her in a taxi.

She fumbled in her bag, and found her keys, including one of the studio. The detective took it, gave her a surprisingly untroubled grin, and said:

"Just take it easy."

He inserted the key, turned and pushed; but the door didn't budge.

"Bolted," he said. "I expect he'll get out the back way. Did you see him ?"

"His head and shoulders were covered."

"Good job you were so nippy," the boyish-looking detective said. "That's the best way to keep out of trouble. Any idea why he should try to kill you?"

"I can't even begin to guess."

"We'll find out," the other said. "Do you know the people in the flat below?"

"No. This is my cousin's place, I don't live here."

"I know," the detective declared. "Well, let's hope the neighbours are in and available."

An elderly man from the ground floor flat put the telephone at his disposal, and ushered Vanity in. Her clothes were singed, but she was not hurt; yet she needed to sit. She heard the detective talking to someone, presumably at Scotiand Yard. She kept picturing that hooded figure, hurling death at her; and then she saw an imagined picture of her sister's face, in death. She sat very still, and did not want anyone to speak to her. No one did, until the detective put the receiver down, then said to somebody else:

“I have to go, but I’ll be back for Miss Roy soon. Could you possibly make her some strong tea or coffee?”

“I’ve a kettle on,” a woman answered briskly.

The couple were very kind when the detective had gone; Vanity was with them for half an hour before there was a ring at the front door bell, and a uniformed policeman stood on the threshold, asking for Miss Roy. The elderly woman who had been so kind argued a little because she did not want her unexpected guest troubled, but the policeman said, as if it clinched the matter beyond all doubt:

“Superintendent West will soon want to see her upstairs, ma’am.”

“I’m all right,” said Vanity. “I’ll go.”

***

It had taken Roger twelve minutes to get from the Yard to 17, View Crescent, after getting Anderson’s message. He blessed his luck that he had thought of keeping a watch on the cousin’s flat, and as he sped along the Embankment, gave orders by radio. It was subtly different from the past. Then he’d had to contact a superintendent and word orders as if they were requests; now they could really be orders. That exhilarated him.

By the time he reached the Crescent, two patrol cars were there, and when he jumped out of his car a uniformed driver came hurrying.

“Back guarded?” Roger asked.

“Yes, sir. Bird’s flown, I’m afraid. We got into the flat by the back door, it was open. There’s an iron staircase, a kind of fire-escape, that’s all.”

“Pity,” Roger said. “Who’s up there?”

“Anderson and two of our chaps.”

“We’ll have a man from Fingerprints in a few minutes.” Roger nodded, and hurried to the open front door. He sensed that the

patrol men were watching, smiling, talking about him. He didn't look round again, but went into the gloomy hall, then up the burned staircase which became brighter as he neared the top. There was a smell of burning everywhere. A constable stood on duty by the open door of James Wickham's flat.

"All quiet?" Roger asked.

"No trouble, Superintendent." The constable hid a smile; Roger didn't bother to hide his, as he strode inside. A patrol car man was looking about a small room which was furnished in contemporary design trying to be contemporary for tomorrow as well as today. Lamps, shades, chairs, bookcases, were all eccentric in shape and decoration, if utilitarian in purpose. Shadows were on the wall by a wide archway, not a door, which led into a brighter room. Roger stepped through.

No one but Anderson was here yet. The investigation team hadn't arrived. In some ways that was a good thing, because it showed Roger the scene in its stark viciousness. This was a fine, large, lofty studio with a clear north light. There were paintings on the walls, on easels, on furniture. Practically every one had been slashed across and across, on some the canvas was ripped as if the only intent had been to disfigure the face painted on it, for all the slashed pictures were faces, most of them futuristic, only one or two conventional. There were fifteen or twenty, not one undamaged — and each was a different version of Margaret Roy.

Anderson turned round, saw who had arrived, and sprang to attention as if he had trained in the army, not a divisional police force.

"Hallo, Anderson, you found Vanity Roy again, I'm told," Roger said, looking away from the paintings. "Where is she?"

"In the downstairs flat, sir, neighbours are looking after her."

"Shock?"

"Took it very well really, but she could do with a breather."

"We'll give her a bit longer. What have you done?"

"Just had a look round, sir, I thought I'd better not touch anything," Anderson said. "I didn't question Miss Roy much, just asked her if she had any idea who'd want to kill her. What a swine!"

"Know what he used?"

"Some kind of Molotov Cocktail," Anderson answered. "I smelt petrol all right. The arson people are on their way."

"Good."

"I did find out the way the man escaped — there's a garden down there, a bit of an alley, and then several streets," Anderson went on. "He could have gone almost any way. I suggested to a Divisional patrol car that they put a cordon round to keep as many people as possible away, in case they could pick up a footprint, but I don't know whether it would be possible."

Anderson was making sure that he made amends for ever losing Vanity Roy.

"Good, thanks," Roger said, and looked round again. "Ugly piece of handiwork here, too."

"Bit queer, sir," Anderson remarked.

"Queer?"

"Wouldn't expect a normal man to do a thing like this, would you ?"

"No." But if you were dealing with a psychopath, Roger thought, would you expect him to kill the woman first, and slash the paintings afterwards? Wouldn't her death be final enough? "This chap Wickham's not bad with his brush, is he?"

"If you like this surrealist stuff, or whatever it's called, I suppose not, sir."

Footsteps announced men from the Yard: from Fingerprints, Arson, the Photography Department and a sergeant jack-of-all-trades. They had a clear-cut job to do; to search for fingerprints or

any other kind of clue, and find the cause of the fire. It was sheer luck, the kind of luck that came once a year or so, that Roger made the find. He was examining the slashes, to see if all the cuts had been made by the same knife, when he backed away and pushed a chair aside. Under it was a spent match and a little heap of cigarette ash. One match and a fraction of an ounce of cigarette ash could be enough to hang a man, and he picked the match up with a pair of tweezers, then saw that there was printing on the stem; this had come from a book of matches.

"Statler," he read, and on the other side saw: 'Hotels'. This might have very little significance, for it simply showed that someone had been to America, brought back a book of matches, and used one here; it might not have been used today, although it looked fresh. There was no smear of paint on it, and the surface was smooth and shiny; it might carry a fragment of a print, but hardly enough to help Fingerprints. The sergeant from that department was working on the back door which led to the fire-escape's iron platform.

"Send a constable for the girl now, will you?" Roger asked Anderson. "Don't say a word about the damage."

"Very good, sir."

It was ten minutes before Roger saw Vanity Roy coming into the lounge. As at the Yard she was staring straight in front of her. This time she looked paler, and there was no doubt that she had had a vicious shock; fear lived in those pearl-grey eyes. Then she saw Roger and he knew that she recognised him.

He held out his hand.

"Good afternoon, Miss Roy, I'm Superintendent West. Mr Naylor had to give up because of that cold of his." His smile was just enough to be pleasant. "I'm sorry you had this fright."

"I'm all right now," said Vanity.

"Did you get a good look at the man?"

“No, I didn’t really see his face,” Vanity answered. “He had a scarf over it, and his hat was pulled low over his eyes.”

“Did you hear him speak?” Roger asked.

“No, I only caught a glimpse of him throwing that — that bomb.” Vanity was very tense. “If it hadn’t been for your man I think it would have set me on fire.”

“Glad he was able to help,” Roger said, and made a mental note to make sure that Anderson was commended. “Sure you’ve no idea why anyone should want you dead?”

“I’ve been trying to think, and I haven’t the faintest idea,” Vanity answered.

Roger left it at that.

“Mind if we go in here?” he asked, and led the way into the studio. He got there first, turned to watch her, and saw the way her expression changed, the horror which leapt on to her face and into her eyes. She looked from one ruined picture to the next, in growing dismay.

“Notice anything particular about the way this has been done?” Roger asked.

Vanity Roy made herself say:

“The cheeks are slashed —” and then she lost what little colour she had, and looked round as if for somewhere to sit. Anderson was hovering, and would have fetched a chair; Roger shook his head. The girl steadied as Roger went on :

“Did you know of anyone who hated your sister, Miss Roy?”

“No. I — I said I didn’t, only this afternoon.”

“Do you know of anyone who hates your cousin, James Wickham?”

“No.” The negative was only just audible.

“How often did your sister model for your cousin?”

“Not — not often.”

“She modelled for all these,” Roger pointed out.

“He used photographs of her when she wouldn’t pose,” Vanity explained, still in a hoarse voice. “She hated sitting still.”

The fresh shock had hit her very hard, and it was easy to see that to her this was a kind of desecration, much more than vandalism.

How far was that impression genuine?

Roger thought most of it was, even allowing for the effect that this girl would have on any man. Anderson was doubtless positive that she was really suffering from the shock; he was using his surprisingly expressive china blue eyes to ask whether he should offer Vanity a drink.

Roger appeared not to notice.

“Miss Roy, you do realise that your sister’s murderer is at large, and is probably the man who tried to kill you, don’t you? Are you sure you don’t know anyone who hates you, your cousin, or. . . .”

“I’m quite sure!”

“Anyone in love with your sister and who had reason to be > jealous of your cousin James Wickham?”

“No,” repeated Vanity, and behaved as if that were a new thought; it seemed to bring her vitality back. “No, of course not,” she went on sharply. “Jimmy was more like an uncle than a cousin.”

Or lover?

“We’ll leave that for now,” Roger said, “but it could be a matter of life or death. Does Mr Wickham have many American friends, Miss Roy?”

That startled her.

“Some, yes.”

“Any in London just now?”

“It’s quite possible. He knows a lot of art dealers, and they often come here. In fact he has an exhibition in the New Bond

Street gallery at the moment, and he's there now. I expect that some American dealers visit him most days."

"Has he been to America lately?"

"Not for over a year."

"Have you?"

"I've never been there."

"Your sister?"

"She goes over once or twice most years," Vanity Roy said, and then tears filled her eyes, as if shˆ suddenly realised she had used the present tense. But she didn't lose her self-control, and seemed to brace herself.

"Has your cousin any bad friends in America, Miss Roy?"

Roger asked that very clearly as he heard footsteps outside; of a man, hurrying. No policeman would hurry like that in these circumstances; the need for haste was past. Roger moved to the door which led to the lounge, and saw James Wickham come striding in. Wickham was forty-five or so, tall, distinguished rather than handsome, with a haughty- looking nose and a somewhat haughty voice. Now he seemed angry, and he glared at Roger.

"Are you in charge here?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then what are these fellows doing in my flat?"

"If you'll just step in here a moment, I'll be glad to tell you," said Roger. Then he saw Wickham's eyes narrow in a curious way, saw his hand go to his chest, as if he felt a spasm of pain: and without taking another step, Wickham said:

"Van's all right, isn't she? My cousin, I mean. I was going to meet her —"

He broke off, and strode into the studio.

5

Interrogation

ROGER WAS within a yard or two of the artist, and missed nothing. First, the expression of relief when he saw the girl. Next, the swift glance round at the slashed canvases. The look of disbelief, followed by horror, and then — after a few seconds while he stood absolutely still, mouth open and eyes rounded, more like a wax dummy than a man — rage stormed into his eyes. His colour ebbed, his eyes glistened, and began to flash. His body seemed to stiffen, and his hands clenched by his side.

"The swine," he said harshly. "The bloody savages." He stepped to the nearest of the portraits, one which was instantly recognisable as Margaret Roy, and looked at it as if he was seeing the murdered woman and not a photograph. Then he raised his clenched right fist and smashed it against the easel, which toppled and crashed.

Anderson moved forward swiftly, but Roger waved him back.

Vanity Roy said: "Oh, Jimmy."

He looked at her, as if he knew she had said something but didn't know what. He stared down at the fallen canvas, then looked round at all the others. He gave a vivid impression that he had lost his sanity, his eyes were so wild; he beat the air with clenched fists, then pressed the heels of his hands against his forehead and stood in a kind of supplication.

The girl touched his arm, without speaking.

At last Wickham lowered his hands and turned to her; tears smeared his eyes and he looked now as if he would burst into wild crying. Instead, he patted Vanity's hand, freed himself, and strode to the window which swept upwards into the roof- light. He stared out upon buildings, chimneys, the garden and the panorama of London across the river.

His shoulders were bowed, as if with a new burden of grief.

Roger broke his silence.

"Have you any idea who did this, sir?"

Wickham didn't answer.

Roger went to his side.

"The quicker we know what you can tell us, the quicker we can catch the man who nearly killed Miss Roy."

"What?"

"A man was waiting here for her, and threw a fire-bomb at her as she went down the stairs. Who else knew she was coming here?"

Wickham gasped: "Oh, my God. Van, are you all right? Are —"

"Who else knew, Mr Wickham?"

Wickham said: "I told my cousin and several people heard me. Oh, God! This is three years' work, ruined." He began to clench his hands again. "And it's more than that, it — how can I expect you to understand?"

Vanity was watching him as if with great compassion.

"Have you any idea who would want to do it, sir?" Roger asked.

"It's — it's the end of a dream," Wickham went on, and his voice was husky and breaking. "I've been working up towards this all my life, this was the very best I've ever done, this was nearly genius! And look at it. Look at it! Oh, God, what shall I do?"

"Do you know who did it, sir?"

"Of course I don't know who did it!" Suddenly Wickham shouted, almost screamed. "How the hell should I know? That's what you're paid to find out, isn't it? Then when the hell are you going to get on with your job, instead of standing there and expecting me to do it for you? First Margaret, then Vanity, now —" he broke off.

“Miss Margaret Roy appears to have been the model for all of these portraits, sir,” Roger remarked flatly. “There is probably a connection between her murder and this vandalism, and I must ask you to give me all the information you can. Do you know who did this?”

“You damned fool, of course I don’t! If I did, I’d break his neck.” Wickham, glaring, shook off Vanity’s hand when she put it on his arm, as if to restrain him. “Asking a lot of bloody fool questions instead of going and finding out who did it.”

Roger changed his approach and said sharply:

“If that’s the way you’re going to talk, you’d better come along with me to the Yard at once, and cool off. Hysterics aren’t going to help any of us.”

Wickham raised his head, as if unable to believe that he had heard aright.

“Are you threatening *me?”*

“I’m not threatening you or anyone else, I just want straight answers to straight questions. I don’t mind whether I get them here, or whether we have to go to the Yard. Anderson, send in Sergeant O’Mara.”

“Yes, sir.” Anderson went out with obvious reluctance.

“Jimmy, try to calm down, and answer Mr West’s questions,” Vanity Roy pleaded.

“Oh, Van, what a swine I am,” Wickham said. “As if these daubs matter compared with you. I’m not myself, I — West! You’ve got to find this killer. Understand? You’ve got to find him at once!”

Six feet of Sergeant O’Mara came in, looking as if he had just flown over from Dublin, with the very look of the Irish on his lined face, in his blue eyes, in the way his lips were pursed. In his large hands were notebook and pencil. He was dressed in green tweed, which had the colour of shamrock about it.

“Sergeant, I want a verbatim report of my questions and Mr

Wickham's answers," Roger said briskly.

"Yes, sir." The Irishman nearly made that sound like "yes, sorr."

Wickham swung round on Roger.

"Why don't you go out and look for the swine, instead of wasting your time here?"

O'Mara's pencil began to move swiftly.

"At least ten detectives are making inquiries from neighbours to try to get a description of the man, others are searching the nearby alleys and streets for anyone who saw him running away, the men on duty here are looking for fingerprints and other clues which may be useful," Roger answered. "Now, please answer my questions. Do you know who slashed these pictures?"

"I've told you a dozen times, *no!"*

"Have you any reason to suspect that any individual would want to damage them, out of spite or for any other reason?"

"No."

"Do you know anyone with a motive for killing Miss Roy here — or her sister?"

"No! I've already told you —"

"All I'm trying to establish are facts," Roger said coldly. "Is this your flat?"

"You know damned well it is."

"Does anyone else live here?"

"No."

"How many people have keys?"

"What the devil are you insinuating?"

"Let me put it another way. Miss Vanity Roy had a key. Who else has?"

"The daily woman," Wickham muttered.

"Anyone else?"

"I think my cousin Michael has."

“Michael Ashley?”

“Yes.”

“Did Miss Margaret Roy have a key?”

“Supposing she did? She often came here to pose for me, but if you’re suggesting —”

“I’m not making any implications, I’m just trying to establish facts,” Roger repeated. “There are no signs that the door was forced or that the lock was opened with a tool. The back door was obviously unbolted by the man when he got away. The inference is that he came in with a key. How many other people had a key, please?”

Wickham’s voice was pitched on a lower key.

“No one else.”

“Sure?”

“Yes, I’m positive, but —” Wickham hesitated, then swung round towards Vanity and smiled at her; he could look very attractive when he smiled, and this was obviously a request for forgiveness. “Michael lost one, a few weeks ago, and my — my other cousin was always losing things. Wasn’t she, Van?”

The girl nodded.

Wickham turned back to Roger, as if his venom was spent.

“Margaret was very careless about things like that, anyone who wanted to could have taken a key out of her bag, and she wouldn’t have realised it was gone until next time she wanted to use it.”

“Can you think of anyone who might have taken hers?”

“No, I can’t. In fact there isn’t a thing I can tell you that I haven’t already told Superintendent Naylor. Where is he?”

“On sick leave.”

“Not before time,” said Wickham. He spread his hands, looked at the portraits and bit his lips, then went on in the new, calm voice: “I’m sorry if I blew my top. This was a hell of a shock, and I

didn't exaggerate on the importance to me. But I know it doesn't help to get mad. You'll have to blame my artistic temperament."

"I quite understand, sir. Have you had any visitors to this flat lately?"

"What do you mean by 'lately'?"

"The past forty-eight hours."

"No."

"Has Mr Michael Ashley been here?"

"No, I don't think so. If he'd let himself in he would have left a message."

"Have you had any guests from America recently?"

"Not for several weeks — three months, probably."

"When did you last go to the United States?"

"January."

"What hotel did you stay at?"

"The Biltmore."

"Did you visit the Statler Hotel?"

"No," answered Wickham, as if trying hard to follow the line of questioning. "I never stay at the Statler. Michael does, and Margaret usually did, she liked to be able to walk round to Macey's and Sach's and the other department stores near there."

"When was Mr Ashley last in the United States?"

"Last month," said Wickham, promptly, and now frowned in earnest. "What are you driving at?"

"Does Mr Ashley smoke, sir?"

"He's a chain smoker."

"Does he use a lighter, or matches?"

Roger knew that Vanity Roy was now watching him as intently as the man. Was either of them worried? Roger couldn't be sure; and could be sure of nothing except that Wickham's attitude had changed so quickly, and that the sharp interrogation and the harping on America had made the girl forget her annoyance.

“He prefers matches,” Wickham answered at last. “He’s always running out of lighter fuel, and doesn’t like the smell of it. He never has.”

“Do you know where he is at the moment?”

“As a matter of fact, I don’t.” Wickham took cigarettes from his pocket, and proffered them; Roger took one, to show that he preferred this amiability. The other detectives were still moving about, but they were not likely to be here much longer, although the pictures themselves had to be examined by an expert; a consultant was on his way from the Yard.

“Aren’t you Chief Inspector West?” Wickham asked.

“I’m West, sir, yes.”

“I thought I recognised you. You’re very like Martin Vere, the stage star, did you know that?” Was Wickham now using soft soap deliberately? “How much do you know about the inquiries that Naylor was making?”

“Everything, I think.”

“Then you know that I’m the artist and Mr Ashley the business man of the family,” Wickham said. “We own the Old World Gallery in New Bond Street, and although most of our stock is old school or conventional, there are always a few of mine, and we were going to put on a special exhibition. Of — of these.” He looked at the slashed canvases, and his lips tightened. “I tried to get in touch with my cousin at his office — that’s not at the gallery, it’s on the other side of Bond Street — because Miss Roy wanted to see one of us, and I couldn’t get away from the exhibition, but he wasn’t in.”

“When was this?” asked Roger.

“About an hour ago, a bit more perhaps.”

“Did Mr Ashley leave a message?”

“His secretary said he’d had a telephone call, and gone out without saying a word. That’s not unusual, he’s rather absent-minded, and he’s had a lot on his mind lately.”

"I see," said Roger. "Right, sir. Do you mind if we use your telephone?"

"Go ahead."

"Thanks. Sergeant," Roger said, turning to O'Mara, "have Anderson telephone Mr Ashley's office, and the Old World Gallery, to find out whether he's back."

"I will, sir," O'Mara replied in his soft, brogue-laden voice, and went off. The atmosphere was much more normal, and Wickham moved to Vanity's side and put an arm around her shoulders. She didn't edge away, but was watching Roger very closely, as if there were a lot of questions she wanted to ask; and more she expected from him.

"Have you seen Mr Ashley today, Miss Roy?"

"No."

"Did you speak to him on the telephone?"

"No." Her eyes were huge.

"Did you have any particular reason for coming here, instead of going to your flat?"

"I think I can answer that for her," put in Wickham, easily, "and you'll probably think we were both a couple of fools, but you don't understand all the pressures." He drew deeply on his cigarette. "Now that this has happened and Vanity is back, you may as well know that I asked her to go down to the cottage. In fact, Michael and I practically made her."

He was wary in spite of the new *bonhomie,* as if he expected sparks from Roger after this revelation.

"I see," said Roger. "That was after you knew about the murder of Miss Margaret Roy?"

"Yes."

"Why did you think it necessary to send Miss Vanity Roy to Lynn?"

"We just didn't see why she should be dragged through the

whole ugly business," answered Wickham. "There wasn't a thing she could do, and you were bound to have her up for questioning, the Press would be hounding her day and night, and there seemed no point in it. We've always made a practice of keeping Vanity away from the seamy side of life, haven't we, Van? She's the baby of the family." He hugged his cousin. "This was such an unhappy, sordid business that we hadn't any doubt that we were doing the right thing."

"Or did you send her away because you thought she would be attacked?"

"If I'd dreamt of that I wouldn't have let her go alone," Wickham answered.

Roger swung round on Vanity.

"What made you change your mind and come and see us at the Yard?"

"I couldn't stand being on my own any longer," Vanity answered simply. "I found a newspaper at a picnic spot, saying that you thought I might be dead, and I didn't think it right to allow you to go on thinking that. And — anyhow, I felt I owed it to Maggie to do anything I could to help."

"How could you help, Miss Roy?"

"By saving you from wasting time."

"Thank you," Roger said, drily. "Did you see your sister's body?"

"No."

"How could you be sure that she was dead?"

"Michael and I found her," Wickham interpolated, "and we sent Vanity away to save her from unpleasantness. I realise it was lunacy, now, but I don't think I'll regret it."

"I see," said Roger, non-committally, and glanced round as O'Mara appeared in the doorway. "Yes, sergeant?"

"Mr Michael Ashley isn't anywhere to be found, sir."

“All right, thanks,” Roger turned to Wickham. “I’ll get back to the Yard but I shall probably have to see you again soon, sir. Will you be here all the evening?”

“I might want to go out for dinner.”

“There’ll be someone here on duty, I’ll appreciate it if you’ll tell him where you’re going.” Roger was still amiable. “Will Miss Roy stay with you?”

“Yes,” Vanity volunteered.

“Thank you,” Roger nodded to the girl, then to Wickham, and went out, with O’Mara following him. Anderson was in the lounge, near the door, but everyone else had gone, so the routine work was finished. If anything of importance had been discovered, it would have been reported by now; the signs were not encouraging.

“Anderson, nip over to the Old World Gallery and to Mr Ashley’s office, and find out what you can about his movements today,” Roger ordered. “See if anyone there has any idea where he is.”

“Right, sir!” Anderson looked glad of another chance to make amends.

Roger went down the stairs first, and was sitting at the wheel of his car as Anderson hurried towards a second police car which would be put at his disposal. Then O’Mara came and poked his nose into Roger’s window.

“Want me any more, sir?”

“Get in,” Roger said. “As soon as we’re at the Yard I’m going to have Vanity Roy guarded as if she were royalty. And I want those notes transcribed in a hurry, we might need a statement signed by Wickham tonight. Any impressions about the gentleman?”

“I’d trust him about as far as I could see him Superintendent,” O’Mara said.

Roger grinned, started off, then took off the radio receiver, and flicked the radio into life. When Information answered, he said:

“I want four men standing by for special duty, that’s the first job. Then I want a list of all friends and acquaintances of James Wickham, the artist, and Michael Ashley of the Old World Gallery, both cousins of Margaret Roy. I’m looking particularly for evidence about Wickham’s temperament — does he fly off the handle easily, or does he usually keep level-headed? . . . Right, thanks.” He flicked off again, and heard O’Mara chuckle. “I wouldn’t like to say how far we can take his word on anything, either. What did you think of the girl?”

“If you’re asking me as a human being, I’ll tell you that they don’t come any prettier even from County Cork,” declared O’Mara. “But if you’re asking me as a detective officer, then I’ll tell you that I think she’s a very frightened young woman indeed.”

“Wouldn’t you be?” Roger urged. “Just because I’ve been kicked upstairs, you needn’t deny me the advantage of your long experience.”

O’Mara beamed.

“If I had to give an opinion, sir, I would say that she is scared because she thinks she knows who’d like her dead.”

“In short, she can lead us to the killer,” Roger said, thoughtfully, “I hope you’re right. I know one thing; I want to talk to the other cousin, Ashley, as soon as I can.”

Five minutes later, he was hurrying up the steps of the Yard. The first man on the steps who congratulated him made him frown for a moment, not quite understanding. Then he laughed, waved and said:

“Oh, thanks,” and hurried on. He reached his own office and thrust open the door, to see Turnbull sitting at his, Roger’s, desk as if Turnbull was the new superintendent. At least he got up, rubbing his hands and making a faint noise.

No one was at the other desk.

“I’ve got bad news for you,” Turnbull announced, as if he

relished the fact. “Mr Michael Ashley, cousin of the late Miss Margaret Roy, got a seat on board a TWA Stratocruiser airliner this afternoon, and is now six hundred miles *en route* for New York. I told Naylor yesterday that I thought we ought to hold him for questioning. Even a blind man should have seen that.”

6

Request to New York

TURNBULLHELD his hands still, and the slithering noise stopped; it was as if he was determined to enjoy every moment of his sensation.

Roger concentrated on the announcement, not on Turn- bull's sneer. There was some justification for it; Ashley and Wickham should have been closely watched, although there had been no apparent reason for holding either. He didn't blame Naylor, simply wished that the other man had cast his net wider.

Now Turnbull seemed to be saying, with a kind of jubilation :

"Here's a mess you helped to make; how are you going to get out of it?"

Roger asked sharply: "What have you done?"

That startled Turnbull, who said: "Nothing. You're the boss."

"You've got a mind, why not use it?" Roger sounded harsher than he felt; Turnbull on the defensive would do no harm for a while. "Cable New York that they might have a killer on their hands. Give details of aircraft, seat number, description of Michael Ashley. Has the Old World Gallery got a New York associate?"

"Yes. On Madison Avenue, Number 700 plus, a place called Rapelli's Gallery."

"How closely do they work together?"

"Exclusive representation, either way, apparently. Rapelli does much more buying than Old World Gallery, though. From what I could make out," Turnbull went on, "Ashley searches England and Europe for old masters and ships them to New York, where the price is very high. I haven't seen any figures but I've been told that they can often get a thousand per cent profit."

"Any other association?"

"Don't know of any. I was working mostly on the dead

woman's overseas connections." So that was out, and Turn- bull was now simply a police officer, quite impersonal. "Maybe someone in New York hated my lady's guts, or else someone in Monte Carlo — she used to spend a lot of time there. My bet would be New York. I'd been finding out where she stayed, how long she was there, and what American friends she had."

"How were you checking?"

"Through a maid who went on the last two trips with her."

"Where did she stay?"

"Sometimes the Statler, sometimes the Waldorf Astoria."

"Know where Michael Ashley stayed when he went to New York?"

"No."

"Have you a city map of New York handy?"

"I can get one pretty quick," said Turnbull. "Now what's on your mind?"

"One or two things I'd like to check," Roger answered as Turnbull turned towards the door. Then he called Turnbull by his Christian name. "Warren."

"Yeh?" Turnbull demanded, over his shoulder.

"We may have a lot of reasons for suspecting Michael Ashley, but we- haven't anything near proof," Roger said. "His cousin, Wickham, isn't out of the wood yet. If the killer's still in England, he might not stop at one victim."

"Meaning Vanity?" Turnbull demanded.

"Who do you think is the best man to watch her, apart from guarding her?"

Turnbull gave his swashbuckling grin, itself a reward for Roger's olive branch. "Warren Turnbull!" he declared. "But since he has a reputation for being a wolf, and has a hell of a lot of desk work to do, anyhow, I'd try young Gregg. He's quick, and can lose himself in a crowd."

“Brief him, will you?” said Roger. “The girl’s still at Wickham’s flat, so Gregg had better pick her up from there. For safety’s sake, have someone go to her flat and be there when she gets back.”

“I’ll fix it, and then get that map of the New York City,” promised Turnbull.

“Just Manhattan will do,” Roger said, and looked down at the papers in front of him. He might have used the right tactics; anyhow, he could not spend any more time worrying about Turnbull.

Nothing new had come in, and he had not yet studied the reports which Naylor had got together; he needed two or three hours with them. One angle seemed to be building up, though; jealousy between the cousins, perhaps a quarrel, perhaps a beauty who played one against the other. That would look sensational in Sunday newspapers, but Roger wanted a case for the court. He took out the report on Michael Ashley, and everything Turnbull had told him was there. He pulled a telephone forward, and the bell rang as he touched it.

“West here.”

“This is Hardy,” said the Commander, in his crisp voice. “I’m just going off, anything special you want?”

“Did you know that Michael Ashley has flown to New York?” asked Roger.

“The hell he has!”

“I’d like to telephone New York Police Headquarters,” Roger went on, hopefully. “It’s not an easy subject to explain in a cable, and we’ve got to alert New York before Ashley gets there.”

“Think it’s big enough for top level?” Hardy inquired.

“Oh, no — it’s only routine, to have Ashley met at the airport,” Roger answered. “Lieutenant Goodison of the Homicide Squad is my usual contact man. He’s sound and he’ll fix it and save us a lot of time.”

“All right, go ahead,” Hardy conceded, and added as an afterthought: “Anything else?”

“Not yet.”

“Take care of the other girl, won’t you?”

“Believe me I will!” Roger said fervently.

“Goodnight,” Hardy said, and rang off; and as the line went dead, Roger realised that he still had not said anything to Hardy about his promotion, the Commander had probably been instrumental in getting it. He called him back at once.

“What’s that, Handsome? . . . Oh, forget it, it was long overdue . . . You’ve got a juicy one for your first case anyhow.” Handy rang off again, and Roger pushed the telephone away from him for a moment, and then called Information.

“Did you get anything on James Wickham for me?”

“Had a word with Mr Fletcher,” the Information CI answered, “and he reports that for a painter, Wickham is about as even-tempered as they come. No temperament to speak of, just a level-headed business man approach. Only once been known to lose his temper — he’d identified a Corot, and a French expert disagreed with him!”

Roger grinned, “Vanity touched, eh? Thanks.”

He rang off, then put in a call to the firm of art dealers who were most often consulted by the Yard. Abel Fletcher was a doyen of the exhibition and sale-rooms, and it was said that he knew more about painting than any other man in London. He was a man of seventy, and when he came on the line sounded like one of forty or fifty.

“Ah, Superintendent.” So he’d been told. “Aren’t you satisfied with my opinion of James Wickham?”

“Perfectly, sir. I’d be grateful for another opinion, too.”

“What about?”

“Do you know Rapelli’s, of Madison Avenue?”

“Very well indeed.”

“Are they all right?”

“I think so.”

“You know that Old World Galleries represent them over here, of course.”

“I’ve dealt with both firms for forty years,” Fletcher said drily.

“You couldn’t tell me the name of the principal in New York, I suppose,” Roger said cunningly, and gave Fletcher a chance to answer promptly: “That’s where you’re wrong. There are two — Gorgio Rapelli himself, and his daughter.”

“Daughter!” Roger was surprised into the exclamation.

“Very charming woman, named Telisa, somewhere in the middle thirties,” explained Fletcher. “She probably controls the business these days, although her father is still nominally the head of the firm.”

Fletcher never introduced a subject without good cause, so Roger asked:

“Any special reason for that?”

“Yes. It’s a closely guarded secret, and would damage the Rapelli Gallery’s reputation seriously if it got out. The old man’s nearly blind.”

“That makes the daughter his eyes,” Roger remarked.

“That’s one way of putting it,” Fletcher agreed. “She’s had a very bad time with him, I do know that. He won’t admit that he’s unable to see pictures properly, and his temper is shocking. Telisa Rapelli has given up a lot for her father — including a husband and a fiancé.”

“Now don’t keep anything back,” Roger said, and won a chuckle, before Fletcher went on:

“She married a man named Clint and there was a divorce, partly Rapelli’s doing, I think. I don’t know a lot about the details, but I always understood that Clint wanted to live in England, and

Telisa couldn't leave her father. Then about three years ago she was going to marry Michael Ashley —"

"My God!" exclaimed Roger. "Ashley's on his way to New York now."

"I can't say I've ever thought he had homicidal tendencies," Fletcher said drily.

"Can you tell me when the engagement was broken off, sir?"

"In the early autumn, two years ago."

"I don't know where we'd be without you," Roger said. "Very many thanks."

"It's my pleasure," Fletcher assured him.

Roger rang off, opened the file to the report on Margaret Roy's movements, and found that she had been in New York in September and October, two years ago — that was about the time when Telisa Rapelli and Michael Ashley had parted.

The telephone rang while he was pondering the possible significance of that.

"West," Roger said.

"I've just come back from View Crescent," a man reported. "I've been looking at those slashed canvases."

This was a detective-inspector who specialized in knife wounds.

"Find anything, Joe?"

"Knife with a very sharp point and a sharp under-side blade was used. Ought to say dagger," the detective-inspector amended rather hastily. "It was blunt on the top edge, though, where it tore the canvas. Whenever it was used with a downward movement, it cut pretty clean. I'd say it was about eight inches long, judging from the sweep of the downward slashes, and probably three quarters of an inch wide at the hilt, tapering to that sharp point. Call it a stiletto."

"Thanks," said Roger. "Put that all down in writing, won't

you?"

"Sure."

Roger rang off, got up, and went to the door; then he hesitated. He ought to make sure that someone was in here, that was the custom. He opened the door and saw a detective- sergeant strolling along and whistling something under his breath.

"Hallo, Brown. Come and stand-in until I get back, or Mr Turnbull turns up, will you?"

"Okay, Super!"

Roger grinned.

He went along to the Records Office, but the man he wanted was out. He walked on to Fingerprints, where in a small room chock-a-block with articles of all kinds, from bottles to bed-warmers, handkerchiefs to cigarette-cases, ash-trays to pokers, all in a great heap in a corner, on a small desk were several smaller articles, and one or two bowls of a grey powder. In the next room, Superintendent Toombs, the Yard's top man in Fingerprints, was sitting at a large desk. Toombs was a fat man, round-faced, genial, always smiling.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo," he boomed. "The Superintendent has come to make sure this department is doing its job properly. Take a seat and we'll show you, superintendent!" He held out a huge hand. "Damned glad to hear about it, Handsome." Roger made noises. "And you're tired of our bleating by now," Toombs went on. "Well, I made a rush job on the prints from Wickham's flat."

"Thanks. Get anything?"

"Print on door handle, back, print on two easels, print on one palette, print on kitchen tap, all identical," said Toombs. "Take a look." He pushed a photograph over, showing what looked like the careless smudge of a child's finger, with a dozen lines marked on it, notes scribbled alongside each. "Tented arch pattern broken by four small scars, thin scar running right across. Broad thumb I should

say. All the same — and not Wickham's or the girl's, the charwoman's or any of our chaps. I can establish that, if you like."

"I'll take your word for it."

"You're learning! Well, I expect you know what's coming," went on Toombs, and paused, but Roger didn't spoil it for him. "They're Michael Ashley's prints. I'm told he's gone on a journey."

Roger felt excitement rising fiercely.

"How about doing the impossible for me?" He took out the envelope in which he had put the spent book match found at Wickham's flat, and opened the envelope cautiously, then shook out the match. "Can you get enough of a print off that to compare with the others?"

"Dare say," said Toombs, and picked it up with a pair of tweezers, stood up, went to a bench behind him, and put the match onto a glass plate. He clipped the match cautiously, put the plate under a microscope, bent closer, and screwed up one eye. He twisted a little knob, then pushed the match about with the end of the tweezers.

He straightened up.

"Take a look," he said. Same print on one side, you can actually make out the whole of one scar. There's your impossible, Handsome, it just takes a little longer."

Roger peered through the microscope; and even to his comparatively inexpert eye, the likeness between this segment of a print and the others was quite evident.

"Thanks," he said, and didn't try to keep the excitement out of his voice. "Look after that match for me, we may want it for evidence. See if you can get the lab boys to check the burnt top, and tell me how long ago it was struck, will you?"

"Like a bit of the moon, as well?"

"Anyone would think you're the only man here who can do the impossible," said Roger, from the door.

“You’re in a hurry aren’t you?” Toombs observed. “Going to rush and report to the Big Chief like a good little Super, I suppose?”

“Just going to make a telephone call,” Roger said, and added as he closed the door: “To New York.”

He didn’t notice Turnbull until that moment. The CI was approaching, and obviously had heard the remark.

“They’ll fall down on the job,” he said, jeeringly. “These damned Yanks are all talk and no do.”

That was too much.

“If you’d talk less and do more we might get this job finished,” Roger said tartly. “I’d rather work with Goodison of Homicide than you in this mood. Shake out of it.”

For a moment there was utter silence, but Roger did not like the way the other man glared at him.

Part II

NEW YORK — FIRST PHASE

7
HOT DAY

IT WAS ONE of New York's hot days, when the humidity made life nearly unbearable. Temperature 96, humidity 84, the headline said in three-inch high letters, and lethargic newspaper sellers did not doubt it. Drooping crowds believed it, too. The bus drivers were snappier, and the traffic snarls seemed to grow worse, as if sweaty hands on the wheels made it impossible for anyone to steer properly. The sky was a metallic blue merging into grey, the kind of sky that threatened heat for another two or three days. No wind came from either river. No one hurried, which was nearly a miracle.

Faces were drawn, damp, pale. Here and there a pretty girl, freshly made-up, looked like a daisy growing in a jungle. The shops were dark caves. People disappeared into elevators and were hurtled up to air-conditioned offices and slid inside as if it was their only hope of living. All this was worse because New York was so full. In two weeks there would be the annual exodus, up state or into New England, and to the beaches and the sea with its promise of coolness and its traps and dangers.

The policemen looked too hot to blow their whistles at the drivers of cars and trucks and taxis, and the drivers looked as if they would not hear a whistle if one sounded. But they did. A crowd waiting on Broadway at 34th Street to surge across the road was pushed from behind, and a dozen people staggered onto the road, close to cars which were swishing by. A traffic cop turned his massive chest towards this helpless fringe, and roared:

"Get orf der road!"

Lieutenant Ivan Goodison, of the New York City Police Department, Homicide Branch, was so near the traffic policeman that he almost felt the gust of air as the shout came.

The words roared through the open window of his Mercury,

which had no air-conditioning; he couldn't afford it. Anyhow, a police lieutenant with air-conditioning in his car would be regarded with heavy suspicion. He was as hot as the other 23,000 policemen in the city, but less irritable than many because he was going home. Home was an apartment on Riverside Drive, between 80th and 81st Streets. Home had air-conditioning in three rooms. Home had his wife and twelve-year-old daughter, big easy chairs, a 21' television and, for the old-fashioned, a portable radio. Home had a view of trees, the Hudson, the varied craft which floated on the river, New Jersey, and, if you craned your neck, a view of the George Washington Bridge. Home was twenty minutes' drive away if he had the luck, fifty minutes if he had none. He could not make up his mind whether to get over to the Hudson River Parkway, or battle with traffic lights and massed cars, trucks and taxis. He would probably make quicker time if he went across to 10th Avenue, but he did not intend to take the cross streets until he was at 42nd. If he got snarled up with the big trucks feeding the department stores or Penn-sylvania Station he could lose another half-hour. It was half-past twelve, and he wanted to be home by one o'clock, because at one o'clock Rose would have the meal on the table. She was a creature of domestic habit. She didn't, for instance, like going to bed in the afternoons.

Ivan Goodison grinned.

She wasn't expecting him. She would jump up when he arrived, and complain that he hadn't called her, she hadn't anything to eat, she wasn't ready for him, she hadn't even put on her make-up. Five minutes later they would be laughing and hugging each other, and everything would be fine. Only two or three times a year did he get away like this, unexpectedly, and he was going to make the most of it.

He was so much off duty that his radio to Headquarters was dead. He was hot and looked it, but heat didn't worry him. The

radio was playing soft music, which stopped abruptly for a man with a Texas drawl to interrupt and explain that in New York right now the temperature was 93 and getting hotter, and humidity was 84, and getting worse. There were swift headlines of news, a couple of commercials, and music again, by which time Goodison was past 41st Street, and ready to swing west off 42nd. Then he saw a patrol car in his mirror; it seemed to push other cars aside, and draw level. The uniformed prowl cop in it called:

"Lootenant Goodison?"

"No," sighed Goodison.

"You're asked to report to the nearest Precinct Headquarters at one o'clock, Lootenant," the driver said, as the lights changed, and then added as he pulled away: "You have a telephone call from London, England."

Goodison sat up.

"From where did you say?"

The words floated back to him: "*London, England."*

It was like being told there was a call from Mars. He looked at his wristwatch; it was sixteen minutes off one, and if he were lucky he could take this call near his home. He meant to be lucky. The traffic seemed to divide for him, and he had a long run of green lights, so that there was no need to turn off Broadway. Who would be calling him from London on police business; that was, who would call *him?*

Roger West?

"If that son-of-a-gun keeps me away from home this afternoon, he'll hear about it," Goodison said, and forgot both heat and humidity.

He reached the Precinct with two minutes to spare, double-parked, nodded to a sweating patrolman on duty, and hurried up the steps and into the low, old brick and brown stone building. He did not know it as well as most Precincts, but here were all the

different doorways, the legends on the boards which stuck out just above head height.

He went into the open doorway marked DETECTIVES, and three men in shirt sleeves, and looking too hot to stand up, were playing checkers. One stirred himself.

"In there, Lootenant."

"Thanks."

"In there' was a small office where Charlie Speigal was sitting, wearing his coat, his spotted red and white bow tie perfectly tied although he had done it himself, shaven face free from sweat, eyes cool and untroubled; he was a neat and effortless man who seemed to possess some kind of internal air-conditioning.

"Hi, Charlie."

"Hi, Ivan. You planning a hands across the sea programme?"

"I'm planning an afternoon at home," Goodison said. "How about calling Rose and telling her I'm on my way?"

"You call Rose," Charlie said. "I don't want to get you into trouble."

"Is it that bad?"

"The next thing you know you may be flying to London, England," Charlie guessed, "and Rose wouldn't like it if you had kidded her you were going to Riverside Drive." He glanced at his gold watch on a wrist free from hair, the shirt cuff unbelievably fresh and white. "It's two minutes past, maybe they changed their mind about calling you."

The telephone bell rang.

"That's yours," Charlie said, and stood up. "You won't want me listening in."

"You stall around," Goodison insisted, and lifted the receiver. "Goodison here . . . Sure, I'll take it . . . Sure, be glad to." He sat on a corner of the desk, grinning down at Speigal. "You don't get any slower," he declared. "You called Headquarters the moment you

knew I was in the street. Charlie, one day they're going to make you a real big fella in the little old Police Department, maybe you'll be Commissioner one day! . . . Yeah, speaking . . . Sure, I can hear you, Mr West! . . . *West*, well how about that! Sure, it's Ivan Goodison . . . Just as if you were in the next room, Handsome! . . . I'm fine . . . Yeah, yeah I know Rapelli's, I know Rapelli in person, also . . . Well, I get paid for it, don't I? . . . What? . . . Yeah, I read an English newspaper every morning of my life, I heard all about the slasher and the Roy woman . . . Yeah, I read she often visited New York . . . *No kidding"*

Charlie Speigal was looking on without smiling. The door was ajar, and a detective with a bald head stood close to it; there was no talking in the outer room.

"Sure," Goodison went on. "I'll get all that done, thanks a million . . . sure, I understand, you can't prove a thing." There was a long pause, then he demanded: "When are you coming to see us again? . . . Okay, Handsome, see you."

He rang off, put his slim hand to his forehead, where the fair hair grew well back, and then slowly made combing motions with his fingers. Speigal pretended to be uninterested.

"Well, what do you know?" Goodison asked.

"You're going to be late home," said Speigal.

"You've got it wrong," Goodison said. "I just have to be on duty earlier than I'd planned, that's all. You read about that slasher killing in London?"

"It was in the Journal-American?

"The guy who probably did it is on his way to New York."

Speigal came to life at last.

That so?" His eyes positively sparkled. "He flying?"

"Right now he's at thirty thousand feet," answered Ivan. "Don't get me wrong, Charlie, West was careful to say that this might not be the right guy, but he wouldn't telephone from London

unless he felt pretty sure. The airplane left London airport around five o'clock London time, around noon our time, it won't be here at Idlewild until midnight. I got time to do everything I want to." He still sat on the corner of the desk. "I've got time to think it out, also," he added, and stood up.

"What with?" Speigal asked.

"You wouldn't know," said Goodison. He moved to the door. "Thanks for the hospitality, Lootenant."

It was so hot in the station that it seemed cool in the street although the sun was almost directly overhead. The coolness was an illusion, and the Mercury was roasting hot inside. Only two people were in sight, apart from the patrolmen outside the police building.

Goodison was not far from his home, but on the short journey he did a lot of thinking. He wouldn't go himself, but would detail two detectives to meet the aircraft, identify this Michael Ashley, and follow him. He would also have the Rapelli shop and apartment watched, which amounted to the same thing, for father and daughter lived above the shop on Madison Avenue. For a wealthy art dealer, Rapelli lived very modestly. Goodison recalled all he knew of the pair, their business, their customers. It was said that more millionaires called at Rapelli's in the course of a month than visited the Stork Club. Probably that was right.

He opened the door of his seventh floor apartment without making a sound, and crept in. It was nearly half-past one. He crept to the bedroom door, which was ajar. The whole apartment was blessedly cool.

Rose lay on the double bed, eyes closed, wearing only a white nylon slip, raven-haired, pale, with her dark lashes curling up, and her breast rising and falling so evenly that Goodison knew she was asleep. He kissed his hand to her, then tip-toed to the kitchen and closed the door before opening the ice box for some food.

***

After eating a corned beef sandwich and blueberry pie, Goodison checked with the officers most likely to know what Rapelli and his daughter were doing. He began to trace back on Michael Ashley's visits to New York, and also on Margaret Roy's. West had told him enough to make that easy, and he didn't have to do it himself. At three o'clock, sitting on the side of the bed, he told Rose exactly what had happened.

"Why don't you get me that box we keep the old magazines in?" she asked. "I've seen a photograph of Telisa Rapelli, I'm sure of that. It's in Sadie's room. While you're getting it, I'll get dressed."

"You can stay the way you are," Goodison said, and grinned at her as he went out. He found the magazines, took them back, and found that Rose hadn't stirred. "How lazy can you be?"

"I think it was in *Life."* She stretched forward. "Let me see." He drew the box further away from her, and she had to lean close to him. Then she realised what he was doing. "Gimme!" she ordered, and leaned back on her pillows, drawing a sheet high.

He surrendered.

They found the picture of Telisa Rapelli in a copy of the *Saturday Evening Post*, in an article about the new craze for the English Victorian painters in the United States. There were also illustrations of some of the paintings, and a full page of the woman. She had a high-bridged nose and a very full mouth, and looked silvery-haired although she was only thirty-six.

"And your friend Handsome West thinks the killer might ask her to help him," Rose mused. "Sure, she'll help him, if she's in love with him. She'll help him if it suits her, also. I can tell her kind."

"Why don't you give up being a housewife, and become a policewoman?" jeered Goodison.

"I can tell," Rose said.

***

It wasn't a job he need do for himself, Goodison insisted, but

because of West's personal interest, he wanted to be up to date with it. So he left instructions to be called as soon as the plane had landed and Ashley had been identified. He waited up until half-past one, when his daughter and his wife were fast asleep, but the call didn't come. He went to sleep quickly, comfortable in a city where the streets were thickly dotted with the poor who tried to catch a breath of coolness in the hot night air. The first sharp ring of the telephone woke him, and he hitched himself up and stretched out for the telephone, before Rose was really awake; she was so used to this kind of disturbance that she usually slept through it.

"Goodison," he announced.

He listened.

"Are you sure about that?"

He listened again, frowning, and something must have stirred Rose, for she turned over, and he sensed that she was looking at him.

"Well, if he didn't I guess he didn't," he said; he was glowering. "Sure, you can go home . . . Sure, take the men off the shop on Madison. Goodnight."

He rang off.

"So he didn't show up," Rose said, as if relieved.

"His name was on the passenger list and one of his grips was on board, but he wasn't, and the stewardess says he never did take his place," declared Goodison. "He must have fooled the London police at the airport. I guess that's easy to do."

"You're actually disappointed," Rose said. "You haven't a killer on your hands."

And in a way, she was right.

Goodison lifted the telephone again, called Headquarters, and arranged for an explanatory cable to be sent to Scotland Yard, for West's attention. There was nothing else to do, because it did not occur to him that the slasher might be in New York, and might be

active, in spite of the news from the airport.

***

Gorgio Rapelli lay between sleeping and waking, in the darkness which was broken only by the reflected light of a store sign, turning red, yellow, blue and back to red with the regularity of clockwork. He could only just make out the colours, and this awareness of his fading sight filled him with bitterness and frustration.

He ought not to be here; he ought to be on the Coast, valuing the Cormm Collection of Renaissance paintings; instead, Telisa had gone.

Before she had left, they had quarrelled bitterly — because he had been compelled to admit that she would be able to do a better job, although she knew nothing, practically nothing, about the period.

He wished he hadn't been so bitter. He wasn't fair to Telisa, she was a good girl, and made many sacrifices for him; but he hated the need for them.

He was alone in the apartment, and it was years since they had kept a living-in help. It was more convenient this way; they could do what they liked much more easily. At half-past eight, old Henrietta would come in, to start breakfast and the day's work; at nine o'clock the staff of the shop would arrive, and he would begin the pretence again. If his staff or his competitors learned about his blindness he would be ruined. In fact he was a rich man, but that did not affect his thinking.

He thought he heard a sound.

He took no notice of it; there were often odd sounds at night, even at the back of the building.

Then he heard the noise again.

It was years since he had insisted on shutting off the shop premises and the store-rooms away from the apartment. The gallery

occupied the ground floor and one above, the apartment was above them. They were served by different doorways, and were protected against burglars. There was little need to fear burglary, but — that had sounded like a footstep.

Rapelli raised his head off the hot pillow, and opened his eyes wide, staring at the door which he could only just see. It was closed but not locked. His heart began to beat faster.

There was an unmistakable creaking sound.

Rapelli pushed back the sheet, and got out of bed, stealthily. The long window overlooked another wall and another window, and darkness except for the faint colour of dawn in the sky.

The air-conditioning was on, but the room temperature was near the eighties. He was thirsty, and went across to the door, hesitated with a finger on the handle, then turned it and thrust it back.

The door banged making real noise.

The kitchen overlooked the street, and much more light came in, with many more colours. Rapelli did not need to switch on the light to go across the hall to the kitchen; he did not need to see. By the time he reached it, and made out the white glow of the ice box he had told himself that he was on edge for no reason at all. He stepped into the kitchen.

He saw a dark, shadowy figure leap at him from behind the door, even saw a glint of steel.

Rapelli tried desperately to fend his attacker off.

8

Slasher at Large

THE HEADLINES screamed.
SLASHER IN NEW YORK
BRITISH KILLER
KILLS ON MADISON

screeched another.
KILLER EVADES COPS
KILLS MADISON ART DEALER

shouted a third, and each front page had its own variation on the same theme. Each newspaper printed the story of the murder of Margaret Roy, as well as her photograph. Radioed photographs of Michael Ashley were alongside it, with Gorgio Rapelli's picture to make the third.

A copy of every newspaper was on Goodison's desk, and he looked at them morosely as he sat alone in his office. It was eleven o'clock. He was expecting another call from West, and was edgy because of the waiting. He didn't like any of what had happened, but least of all he liked the implication that he could have prevented it. There was an atmosphere at Headquarters, an implication that if he hadn't been at home all yesterday afternoon, he might have done a better job. Undoubtedly he had made at least one mistake. If he had kept a man watching the shop on Madison, the killer could not have got in unobserved.

The killer had used a key.

Goodison pictured the face of old Rapelli as he had seen him that morning, lying where he had fallen after being attacked. 'Old' wasn't true; he was in his early sixties, that was all. He must have fought desperately for life, and had been slashed and slashed again,

before a razor-like edge had sliced the carotid artery.

The telephone bell rang, and Goodison lifted the receiver quickly, but it wasn't the London call, it was Captain Tollifer, with his cold-voiced inquiry:

"Did we pick up the Britisher yet?"

"We haven't found any trace of him."

"Those prints we picked up on the door and the handle of the apartment, have they been compared with Michael Ashley's prints?"

"We're waiting to get Ashley's prints from London."

"Let me know as soon as we are sure our slasher and theirs is the same one," Tollifer said. "How about Rapelli's daughter?"

"She's on her way."

"Have her met at Idlewild," Tollifer said, and rang off.

He was a man whom one could never be sure of; he might be cool; he might be as friendly as he sounded; he might sound friendly and be ready to stick a knife into your back. Well, not exactly that; ready with the knife, as if he might thrust it in. Goodison grimaced at the harsh comparison between that thought and between the wounds on old Rapelli's face, and neck.

The murder had all the hallmarks of a psychopathic killing, but it would be a long time before Goodison concentrated on that angle.

There were a lot of things he had to accept, and one was that he was stuck with this transatlantic investigation. Looked at the right way, it could be stimulating. For instance, the Yard man Roger West. Goodison remembered West well, remembered how he had liked him, how he had been liked by most people he had met. The picture of the stuffy, stiff-necked Englishman had been banished for ever. But West had been in New York on a case long enough to show Goodison not only differences in approach, but wide variations in outlook, which sprang from totally different conditions. Take psychopathic cases, which were part of the New

York pattern of crime investigation. Put that down to the enormous influx of immigrants; to mixed races; to drink, drugs, or some hidden factor in the American way of life, it didn't matter which: it was a major consideration in the investigation of crime. In London such cases might occur, but were not part of the pattern, rather pieces which didn't fit in. So West would examine the same factors from a different angle, putting the emphasis in different places. And being three thousand miles apart wouldn't help.

There was the difference in time too. Noon in New York was five o'clock in the afternoon in London. It was necessary to ask yourself what time it was every time you felt like lifting the telephone. Tollifer would be quick enough to ask in that aloof way of his:

"Don't you trust Western Union?"

Goodison picked up a Cable and Wireless message, which had come in from London half an hour ago, and which had really completed his process of self-refrigeration. It was timed three o'clock pm in London, and read:

No possible doubt Ashley was on that aircraft stop grateful if you will check

West, Yard.

You could like a man when you met him, four or five years ago, and still not like it when he called you a liar or a fool.

Goodison grinned wryly.

"Forget it," he said. "He's wrong or we're wrong, and if we're wrong, how did Ashley fix it? Or else neither of us is wrong." He picked up radioed photographs of Michael Ashley, a dark-haired man, lean, five feet ten, a hundred and fifty pounds, with thin features, very big eyes, cheeks which would be hollow if they became much thinner, a hooked nose. It was a good face to recognise, the bone formation and that nose stood out so clearly.

Goodison studied a profile and a full-face, then lifted a telephone and said: “Jensen there? . . . Send him in.” He let the receiver go down with a bang, took out cigarettes and was lighting one when Detective 1st Class Hank Jensen came in. The marvel was that he was known as Hank, not as the Swede. He was the Nordic type, the type who must have been the answer to Hitler’s prayers, big, fresh-faced, clear-eyed, with crisp fair hair in a crew cut. He was wearing a dark brown suit which fitted loosely on his broad square shoulders and round his hard, flat stomach, and which threw up the startling fairness of his complexion and his hair.

“What’s going on?” he asked.

“The Captain wants to know if we’ve found the Britisher?”

“We started looking for people that aren’t here?”

“That’s it,” said Goodison. “Hank, I’ve got news for you. You’re going out to Idlewild. You’re going to question the customs and all the officials who handled the Stratocruiser last night, including the porters, and you’re going to find out where the crew is, and talk to them. I’ve just thought up a way that the Ashley guy could have been on that plane.”

Jensen looked sceptical.

“Scotland Yard could be wrong, remember.”

“And I’d enjoy pointing it out,” Goodison conceded. “But supposing Ashley went on board under a different name? Supposing he had booked himself two tickets, and used only one of them? So far we’ve talked about a name, we haven’t talked to the airport people about a guy. Here’s the guy. Go and see if anyone recognizes him.”

Jensen studied the photograph closely; for him, it must have been like looking at a man from another planet.

“How’d he fake his passport?”

Goodison grinned.

“I dare say they can fix that even in England.”

Jensen relaxed. “Okay, Ivan. Who’ll I take?”

“Carosi around?”

“Yeah.”

“Take him, and call me as soon as you get some news,” said Goodison. He nodded, and Jensen turned and went out; then Goodison picked up other photographs of Rapelli. You had to harden yourself against the effect of this kind of picture on the stomach; the wound inflicted by a knife was as much a clue as a match stick, a handkerchief or a fingerprint. His lips set tightly and his jaws clamped as he studied it. He dropped it and picked up a telephone.

“I want to talk to Identification.” He held on, no longer looking morose, but his eyes glittering. “Hi, Jack, you got those pictures of Margaret Roy for me yet? . . . Sure, I know there are some being radioed and more being flown over from Scotland Yard, but some of our agency boys must have some. . . . Well, shop around, Jack, shop around. I want them quick.” He rang off, and went to his window. It gave him quite a view of rooftops and television antennae, brown- stone houses, and stunted skyscrapers.

The door opened, and an old man with a bald head came in, holding a sheaf of papers.

“There’s some more cables from London, Lootenant.”

“That so, Sam? You translated them yet?”

The messenger grinned.

“And some reports from the Precinct.”

“Thanks,” said Goodison, and took the papers, then looked hard at the old man, whose eyes were swimming in sweat and whose face looked as if it were oiled. “Boy, it’s hot. Why don’t you get yourself a shower?”

“I’d be as oozy again five minutes afterwards,” Sam said.

Goodison sat at his desk, forgetting Sam, the heat, everything but the cables that were on top of the sheaf of papers. His eyes

began to glitter again. Here were verbatim medical reports on Margaret Roy's wounds, details he needed badly; and here also was a long, precise description of the damage done to the portraits in the man Wickham's studio. There were detailed descriptions of Wickham and also of the murdered woman's sister, Vanity Roy.

There were details of the visits which Ashley, Wickham and Margaret Roy had made to the United States, all the lead that Goodison needed; and there were highly technical descriptions of the fingerprints found at the Chelsea studio, as well as of Ashley's prints.

"Maybe you're not a bad copper after all, Handsome," Goodison said aloud, then looked up as the door opened to admit a uniformed man, also with papers, which were obviously more photographic prints. "Fine," he said, and spread them out on his desk. These were from London, and covered most of the things he needed to know: photographs of Ashley's prints, of the cousin, Wickham, the girl, Vanity Roy, but most important were the photographs of Margaret Roy, after death. He wished they were in sharper detail; there were drawbacks in radio pictures. He studied them with a magnifying glass, nodded, put the glass in his pocket, collected the photographs and went out and along the passages to a door marked PHOTOGRAPHIC BUREAU.

It was just another office; all the camera work and the developing was done in rooms beyond. Round the walls were big metal cabinets, with shallow drawers. Three men worked at three desks, and the largest desk had the smallest man: Jack Sherpa. Sherpa had the brightest dark brown eyes in New York; those eyes looked as if they had been intended as lenses for a precision camera.

"Hi," Goodison greeted.

"We've been working for you fifty-nine minutes out of the last hour," Sherpa said. "Okay if we take one minute off for the other

seventeen homicide cases?"

"Sure. Later." Goodison handed him the radioed photographs. "You seen these?"

"I personally took them out of the emulsion."

"I understand why they're smeared," Goodison said. "Jack, compare the wounds in Rapelli's cheeks with the wounds on the Englishwoman's will you?" He watched as Sherpa screwed a watchmaker's glass in his eyes, and waited while one of the other men stared at him, and the second went on with his job. Someone ran along the passage outside, and a door slammed. The working clerk dabbed his forehead. Sherpa dropped the glass and caught it casually, pushed the photographs aside, and demanded:

"What do you want me to tell you?"

"The facts, Jack, just the facts."

"Those wounds weren't caused by the same knife, or the same kind of knife."

"You positive?"

"Yeah."

"Jack, you're my boy," said Goodison, and his smile had a kind of tenseness which hadn't been there before. "Blunter knife on Rapelli, that right?"

"Yeah. Skin's broken, not cut the same way."

"Anything else?"

"The incisions aren't so deep."

"Write that down in technical phraseology and let me have three copies," Goodison pleaded, "because I want to impress a lot of people with that, and I want to send a copy to London as fast as I can get it there. Make sure there isn't a thing they can argue is wrong."

"Facts," declared Sherpa, "are facts. In a hurry?"

"Can I have it an hour ago?"

"I'll send it over yesterday," Sherpa said, and switched the

light off in his eyes; he actually grinned as he added plummily: “I won’t let the side down, old boy!”

Goodison grinned back.

He went back to his own office, lifted a telephone before sitting down, and asked:

“Captain Tollifer there?” He waited, motionless, until Tollifer came on the line.

“Yes, Lootenant?”

“Can you see me right away, sir?”

“Come right in.”

“Thanks.” Goodison gathered up the photographs and went through three offices, all with men working and girls working, none of these taking any notice of him except Tollifer’s secretary, who gave him a broad smile and waved to the door. He opened it. There was Tollifer sitting at a big desk in a large airy, very cool room, overlooking rooftops. Everything about Tollifer was neat and spotless; so was everything about his office. He gave the impression of never having anything to do, and he made it a rule never to have two files on his desk at the same time. He was as polished as the desk in his dark suit, the narrow tie with the single pearl in the centre, the shiny brown shoes, the silk shirt.

“What have you got?” he asked. No ‘Ivan’.

“Take a look at these,” said Goodison, and handed over one of each of the photographs. Tollifer would not want to give an opinion, but would want to be told what this was all about. “Different knives were used, with different cutting edges. The wounds are deeper in the London case than in the New York one.”

“Sherpa agree with you?”

“Yeah.”

Tollifer nodded, and waited.

Goodison went on: “If it was a different weapon, it could have been used by a different man. Whether Ashley was in New York or

not, we ought to make sure of that. There could be one killer who flew across to murder Rapelli, and there could be two, one on each side of the ocean."

Tollifer studied the photographs.

"Yes," he agreed. "Telephone West whenever you think the business is urgent enough." But still no 'Ivan'.

"Sure."

"Is Telisa Rapelli in yet?"

"She arrived at Idlewild an hour ago, and should be down town by now," Goodison reported.

"You'd better go and see her yourself," said Tollifer. "If you think it's necessary, advise me, and I'll see her. Be very careful how you handle Miss Rapelli."

Goodison thought: "Sure, she's a good Democrat like her Dad." He didn't say it, but said flatly: "I've noticed an unusual feature about the Rapellis, in the past few years."

"Years?"

"Yeah."

"What?"

"The old man used to do the travelling. Now Miss Rapelli does."

"What's so unusual for an old man to want to stay home?"

"He's not so old. Sixty-three."

"What are you trying to say?" Tollifer demanded.

"I'm wondering if there's any reason for the change of custom."

"Check it," Tollifer said, and Goodison went out. He could telephone West at once, or wait for word from Hank Jensen. He decided to wait. The possibility that there were two killers gave this a touch of the macabre. One killer being hunted in London, one in New York at the same time. He went into the office adjoining his and said to the desk sergeant: "Jo, I'm going to Rapelli's gallery, the

daughter will be there. If Hank calls from Idlewild, be sure I get the message."

"Okay."

Goodison hurried, past people, doors and blank walls, and out into the street. He had forgotten how hot it was, and the sun seemed to single him out for frying. "Jeeze," he said aloud, "Rose will spend all day in the shower." It took him four minutes to find his car and two minutes to edge her away from a Cadillac behind him and a Lincoln in front. By that time he was wringing wet with sweat. "Why don't they call them trucks and be done with it?" he grumbled, and headed his Mercury towards the mid-Town area. There wasn't so much traffic on this road; he had a distinct impression that people were keeping out of New York if they could. He drove fast between lights, and sat still, smoking and tense, at all the reds. He reached Madison at 71st Street, past Rapelli's, and a miracle came to pass, for he had room to park. He jumped out of the car, and looked fresher than any of the three patrolmen and the fifty gawpers who were near the shop. Inside he saw two Precinct detectives talking to Telisa Rapelli,

There was beauty and beauty. Hers was not classic, her features were not even regular, but her colouring was superb. She had a coppery kind of red hair a man didn't really believe in; masses of it in thick curls. Her skin had the flawless creaminess of redheads, and she used just enough make-up to emphasize the honey colour of her eyes.

She was tall for a woman, but not big; and exactly the right shape.

The patrolman recognized Goodison and let him pass, and he opened the shop door. Its bell had a soft note, melodious and pleasing. The door closed behind him, and Telisa Rapelli was saying:

"Of course I know Michael Ashley, he is an old friend of mine,

and an old friend of my father's. What nonsense is this?" She turned to look at the newcomer, but Lieutenant Ivan Goodison meant nothing to her. "It is absurd to think Michael would do this hideous thing."

Her voice was rich, although she sounded edgy. She looked as if she hadn't slept on the flight, but her hair wasn't disarranged. She wore a dark green linen dress that hadn't come from a budget floor, and it was easy to see how she chose colours to throw up her own vivid natural colouring.

Lieutenant Mason, the Precinct man in charge, said laconically:

"Hi, Lootenant. This is Miss Rapelli." She turned easily, gracefully. "This is Lootenant Goodison, from Headquarters," Mason went on. "We're handling this together."

Telisa was in some ways like her father, but her nose was smaller, her mouth a nicer shape and softer. She certainly hadn't slept, for her eyes had a glassy look. She had left San Francisco last night, and while she had been in the air her father had been murdered — yet she hadn't slept. Was she just a bad sleeper when flying, or had there been some other reason for her sleeplessness? Had she been frightened of what might happen, and had that fear brought her home?

Two men were coming from the back of the shop, Dario the manager of the gallery, and a salesman. It was easy to anticipate that they were going to protest: to say that Miss Rapelli must have some rest.

"Do you know why there are all these questions about Michael Ashley?" she demanded. Her husky voice sounded as if it might break at any moment.

"Yes, ma'am, I do," Goodison said, and waved the manager and the other man away. "Mr Ashley is wanted for questioning about the murder of Miss Margaret Roy, in London, England, and

we have reason to believe that he flew from London and arrived here late last night. Do you know where he is?"

Telisa began to reply, stopped, and then closed her eyes. Was she going to faint? The manager took her arm, and defied

Goodison, but he didn't speak. He was a Mussolini of a man, short, thickset, with very heavy jaw and jowl.

"No," the woman answered at last. "No, I heard of — of Margaret's murder, and flew back to talk to my father about it. I was ready to fly on to London. It wasn't Michael," she added, in a voice which seemed to make it clear that she was desperately afraid that the killer might have been Michael Ashley. "It couldn't have been."

"I'm going to take Miss Rapelli back of the shop," Dario said. "She needs rest to help her before she is questioned any more."

Goodison flashed a smile. "Sure, okay, we don't want to make anyone ill." He winked at the Precinct man, and waited until Telisa Rapelli had been led away, then looked round the gallery. Dario and possibly the woman chalked that up as a victory; they would learn.

Goodison had been to the gallery twice already, and it was familiar enough. There were art dealers and antique shops of two kinds: the shop with a conglomeration of every conceivable type and kind, with rococo pieces standing next to real gems, one bright and freshly cleaned picture next to another with the dirt of ages on it; and there was the exclusive *salon,* with a few choice pieces shown to the best possible advantage, the stock kept spick and span, or in store-rooms out of sight. Rapelli's was one of the *salons.* The carpet was thick, the walls were decorated as if they belonged to a room in some great private home. There were gilt dados, oak panels in some places, papered panels in others. The lighting was from chandeliers, or else was concealed. Pictures were spaced so that they could be given full attention. Small pieces of furniture, most of

them centuries old and mostly from Europe, although some were oriental, stood as they might in a private house.

At the back, Goodison knew, were large store-rooms, kept as well as the Bureau of Criminal Information at Headquarters. Other Rapelli store-rooms were in different parts of New York, the biggest being just over Queensborough Bridge, in Long Island City. This was big business, and

Rapelli's customers were spread from coast to coast and continent to continent.

Who would inherit?

The question had already hit Goodison hard. Well, who would? This daughter?

There were plenty more questions to ask Telisa Rapelli and her lawyers, who weren't around yet. That didn't surprise him. Rapelli's man was a family friend who knew everything about the legal side of contracts, and buying, and selling, but nothing about criminal cases.

The man would know the next of kin; or the next in line for a business worth millions of dollars.

Millions?

"Sure," Goodison said, answering himself. He turned to Mason. "How about Rapelli's lawyer?"

"He's on his way."

"You got anything else?"

"Not a thing," Mason said. He always gave the impression of being sore or sour, and he would resent a Headquarters man being here so soon; but he'd had his orders. He was a biggish man, running to fat, who was usually too hot, even in the winter. But it was cool inside here, and even he wasn't too hot now. "I've had five men going over the apartment, and they haven't found a thing. The guy used a key."

"This Michael Ashley have a key?"

“Yeah, Miss Rapelli admits that.”

“Who else?”

“She says, no one but the cook, her father and herself.”

“Not the manager, Dario?”

“No one at all, she says,” Mason repeated and sniffed. “Lootenant, I think she was so frightened she started to get back before her father was murdered. If you ask me, the news that the English dame had been killed started her off. That’s the angle I’d use. I wouldn’t give her time to recover her breath. Right now, she’ll talk. Give her an hour, and maybe she won’t.”

“You’d take her to the station?”

“Sure.”

“Later, maybe,” Goodison said, and looked straight into the Precinct man’s eyes. “You want to know something?”

“What?”

“You’re holding out on me.”

“Don’t dream things up.”

“Let’s have it,” Goodison said, flatly. “We’ve got to work fast. We’re in competition this time, and I don’t mean the Precinct versus Headquarters. You wouldn’t want Scotland Yard to step ahead of us, would you?”

Mason said, grudgingly: “I just had an idea. It’s only an idea, and maybe it’s crazy. You won’t hold me to it.”

“Ideas arc valuable.”

Those cuts on the face,” said Mason, and he turned to a table, the dark shiny beauty of which held some photographs of the murdered woman. “You see them? Those incisions.” He liked the word, and repeated it: “I’ve seen incisions like that before some place, two — three times I guess. The same kind of incisions on flesh. I seem to sec them on faces, too.”

“Yeah,” Goodison said, and felt a sudden pounding of excitement. “I know what you mean. They make a kind of pattern.”

“Sure. You’ve seen slashed faces by the hundred, but these. . . .”

“They’re teasing you,” Goodison said. “Now they’re teasing me. You want to do something?”

“Maybe.”

“Call Jack Sherpa. Tell him what you’ve told me. Ask him to search the files.”

“This is a message from you?”

“It’s a message from you, you want to surprise me.”

A rare thing happened: Mason smiled.

“Okay,” he said.

“There’s another thing,” Goodison said. “You know any reason why old Rapelli stopped travelling, and his daughter took over?”

“I could guess,” Mason answered.

“Guess.”

“There’s a rumour that Rapelli had been losing his sight. He wouldn’t want to admit it, no one would trust his judgement of pictures if they knew, but one of his assistants opened his mouth to one of my boys.”

“So the daughter covered for him,” Goodison hazarded. “We’ve got to add that up right, talk good to Sherpa.”

There was a disturbance at the door, and then a man who might have been Rapelli’s father came in, a tall, silver-haired man, also in black coat and striped trousers, but making a concession to the modern age with a soft collar. Dario came hurrying forward, too, bulldogish, as if he knew that he had to treat this man with exceptional deference. This was Sylvester, the lawyer who had started out, years ago, on Riverside Drive, and then moved to Park Avenue in the wake of the millionaires. He was a soft-voiced Bostonian, and could freeze you with a look; he could also be the gentleman of gentlemen.

He came forward, and Dario hovered like a pugnacious

acolyte.

Dario talked. . . .

This was terrible, terrible. Miss Rapelli was suffering severely from shock, she must see a doctor, a sedative, a shot, she was in no state to be questioned further. Dario did not speak direct to Goodison but seemed to be talking at him, his big jaw making him look like a barking bulldog. “You’re dealing with millionaires, with big shots,” he seemed to be warning. “Remember that”. Outside was the bright sunlight, and inside the soft light and Sylvester, who was going to be regal, imperious, and the puller of political strings.

Goodison blocked his way.

“Mr Sylvester,” he said, “I’m Lieutenant Goodison, from Headquarters, and I’ve instructions to cause Miss Rapelli the least possible distress.” That was always a winner. “I wonder if you would help me with some information. It might enable me to delay questioning Miss Rapelli until she’s had good time to rest.”

Mason heard the tail-end of this, and grinned again as he went out, to his car and the radio. Sylvester glowed, graciously.

“That’s very considerate of you, Lootenant, I’ll be glad to help in any way I can.”

“Thank you, sir. You know as well as I do that the first thing to find is motive, and the quicker we find the motive the quicker we shall find the killer.” Sylvester nodded ponderous agreement to these platitudes. “So I’m looking for motives. Who was Mr Rapelli’s heir?”

“His daughter, naturally.”

“That right?”

“It is quite right.”

“Who is *her* heir?”

“I am unaware of any next-of-kin in this country,” Sylvester said. “There is an obscure cousin, living in Southern Italy.”

Goodison flashed a question and a glance at Telisa. But for the

dazed, tired look in her eyes, she was normal; she looked as if nature had made her up by technicolour.

"Have you made a will, Miss Rapelli?"

"No," she answered at once.

"No will, and you're worth . . ."

"Miss Rapelli will soon repair that omission," Sylvester became cold.

"No marriage?"

Telisa didn't reply.

"Miss Rapelli, if you have a husband, he is your next of kin."

"I was married," she admitted, heavily.

"And unhappily the marriage ended in divorce," interpolated Sylvester. "That is a three-year-old secret, and the ex-husband has no claim at all."

"This marriage — was it secret also?"

"It was."

"To whom?"

"Telisa," said Sylvester, "you do not need to answer."

Goodison guessed.

"Mrs Michael Ashley?"

"No!" Telisa answered, and her voice seemed to reflect deep hurt.

"Did your Father know of this marriage?"

"Yes," answered Sylvester, "and he was greatly distressed when they were compelled to acknowledge that it did not work out satisfactorily."

"Come on, let's have it! Who was the guy? I can find out, why waste my time?"

Sylvester insisted: "There is no reason why he should be involved and we are under no obligation to answer."

"Did Mr Rapelli have any other unsuspected in-laws?" Goodison demanded, roughly.

Sylvester froze. “Miss Telisa was his only daughter. I must insist that she rests, and sees a doctor at once.” He pushed past, as nearly as he would demean himself, and led the girl to a room at the back of the shop.

Goodison watched that unbelievable coppery hair, and hoped that he was playing his cards right. He went out, going to the side door, which led to the apartment. Two cops stood outside, one of them resting his right hand on his belt, close to his gun. He looked as if he would melt. There were few people about and three cars passed in a row, travelling slowly. Even a bus seemed to crawl, growling. Goodison went briskly up the stairs, and was greeted by another patrolman, then by Precinct detectives who were finishing the search of the apartment. The body had been removed, but nothing else had been touched.

“Anything?” Goodison asked.

“No, sir,” a man replied.

“There’s one thing,” another put in.

“That so?”

“Maybe it doesn’t signify,” the speaker said, “but there was a print on a glass in the pantry, it had been put away without being washed properly, Lootenant. You want to see?”

“Sure,” said Goodison, and took the offered magnifying glass, went into the kitchen and squinted at the print on a glass standing by itself on stainless steel. Black powder had been used, and showed the print up vividly.

It was one of the good and the bad moments.

That was identical with the print he had examined at Headquarters: Michael Ashley’s print. He studied it, and then straightened up, looking into the anxious face of the man who had found it, and said:

“If that was uranium it couldn’t be more precious. Have it photographed right where it is. Then wrap it up and put it in a box

and protect it with your life."

"Yes, sir!"

So Ashley was here in New York, Goodison thought, he must have reached Idlewild on the Stratocruiser. That was the worst part of the discovery. There was a chance that it was an old print, but prints usually faded in a week or two, and this one was very clear, and probably recent. Goodison did not marvel that it should be found and knew that he should be jubilant, yet Felt glum. But that did not slow him down. He looked round the apartment, where everything the Precinct Homicide Squad had thought of interest was laid out on tables and chairs, for quick examination. Nothing seemed particularly significant. He was about to leave when a telephone rang, and he was called to it.

"Who wants me?"

"Sergeant Jensen."

Goodison took the receiver eagerly. "Hallo, Hank."

"I've got news for you," Jensen said, in a voice which was like news itself. "Ashley was on that plane last night, no kidding. The stewardess, the second pilot, the steward and two passengers recognised his photographs. So did the customs men. He was on board as a Mr Marshall Abbott. His ticket, his passport, everything he had with him was in that name. He was on the passenger list as Abbott and as Ashley. He made sure we concentrated on that empty seat. The guy's smart."

But the smart guy had left a fingerprint.

"Sure, Hank," Goodison said. "So we've got Ashley on our hands." He didn't say anything about the fingerprint proof. "Now I've got news for you. Telisa Rapelli was married, but divorced. She's Rapelli's only heir."

"Wow!"

"That's my reaction, also," Goodison said dryly. "See you." He rang off, scratched his head, and then went down the stairs. Facts

were his stock in trade, not hunches; the ugly facts were that Michael Ashley *alias* Marshall Abbott was in New York, so there was nothing really decisive about the use of different weapons, and the difference in the incisions. He went down, stepped into the street, and saw Mason striding from his car, which was double-parked.

"I've got news for you," Mason echoed Jensen, and his expression had lost its sourness.

"News is what I want most," Goodison said.

"Those incisions."

"Those cuts."

"You remember Pillitzer?"

The question had given Goodison its own answer, but he listened patiently to Morgan's triumphant explanation. A man named Pillitzer had served ten years for a peculiar mixture of crimes; he had stolen valuable paintings, often cutting them from their frames, and had been caught red-handed by a collector who had tried to stop him.

He had slashed the collector's face, blinding him with his own blood, in an effort to escape.

And twice again he had slashed his way to freedom, until he had been caught in Boston, six years ago.

He ought to have had twenty years, but someone had pulled some strings, and he'd had five. The slashes were Pillitzer's trade-marks; and the trade-mark now lay on Rapelli's cold cheeks.

"How quick can we find Pillitzer?" Goodison demanded.

"I can take you to him right now," Mason said.

9

Pillitzer

PILLITZER DID not live on Madison, he lived on Park; but that didn't mean luxury. Round the block from his place, a row of five storey houses was falling down, lived in only by rats and the children of Puerto Ricans who lived nearby — since the spate of immigrants had reached its height. At one corner was a delicatessen, at another a bottle store, and between the two other shops from which one could buy almost anything if one had to live cheap.

Pillitzer usually lived cheap.

"But not right now," Mason said to Goodison as they drew up at a corner from which they could see Pillitzer's window, overlooking Park Avenue.

"That's right," a local Precinct man said. "Yesterday, Pillitzer got drunk. He hasn't hit the bottle so hard in months. When he's in funds, he hits the bottle. When's he's not, he slaps his wife."

"Where's she?" asked Goodison.

"Right now, Ella's out at work. Someone has to earn the living." The Precinct man was middle-aged, taut, tough, and cynical.

"So Pillitzer's alone."

"Sure. That third floor window."

"And the place is covered at the back?"

"Yeah. He won't get away," the local man said positively, "but you need a way to get him out. Don't take chances with Pillitzer, Lootenant." He touched the gun underneath his coat. "We gotta wait until he comes out, and then cover him real from both sides and from across the road. That guy's real mean."

"We want him now," Goodison said, heavily.

"Brother, we've been wanting him for a year — a few hours

won't make any difference."

"If he was paid to murder Gorgio Rapelli we want to know who paid him, and we want to know in a hurry," Goodison said, "so I'm going to get him. I don't want any help, either. Have one man in that grocery store opposite, and all your men in position, ready to move in. But I want to go in alone."

"You have to be a hero," the local man said: that was almost a sneer.

"That's right," said Goodison.

He got out of the car and walked away from the corner, so that he could not be seen from the window of Pillitzer's room. He felt the hardness of the .38 beneath his arm, and hitched his shoulders and shifted it a little, to make sure it was right for pulling.

All the airports had been watched, there was a check on the road bridges and the tunnels for Michael Ashley, who wasn't going to stay free for long; but the quick way to break this case was to make Pillitzer talk.

Goodison turned back, ignored the police cars and the anxious men in them, and waited at the light, crossed, went down the street opposite, and round the block so that he approached Pillitzer's front door. A coloured patrolman came strolling past, the handle of his gun jutting out, as if he wanted to make sure that everyone knew he had it handy. A fat coloured woman was laughing on a wheezy note inside a candy store. A man was sitting alone at the bar of a drugstore, which was empty except for the clerks, with their shiny, perspiring dark faces, and their quiet eyes. A white man was conspicuous here, but no one appeared to take any notice.

A small, tight-looking, swarthy man, better dressed than most, with squared shoulders and a swinging walk, passed Goodison, whose long strides were slow and deliberate, and turned into the doorway Goodison was approaching. Goodison reached the

doorway, still showing no sign of haste, and heard the sharp footsteps of the little man hurrying up the stairs. The stairway was dark and there was no elevator. A window somewhere out of sight gave a promise of daylight. Here was heat worse than anything Goodison had known in weeks; it was like walking into a room filled with steam. He eased his collar, and started up the stairs. Sweat began to drip out of him as he reached the first landing.

He was counting the other man's steps; fourteen to a landing, then flat footsteps making the different sound of walking on the level. Fourteen more, to another landing. Fourteen more.

They stopped.

The swarthy man was at the third floor.

Goodison began to move faster than he had all day. He went on his toes, making little sound on the hard stairs, but listening intently for a door to open, and for voices. He heard the door; no voices, no tap, just the opening of the door. There would be more than one apartment at the third floor, two, maybe three, so this meant nothing. He came within sight of the third floor, and saw a door closing; but it didn't dose tight.

A man said: "That you, Ella?"

Pillitzer, expecting his wife.

A gun spoke on its solitary, barking note; then spoke again. Sounds followed, which might have been of a man collapsing and falling. It seemed beyond doubt that the swarthy man had come to kill Pillitzer, and so rob the police of a vital witness.

Goodison reached the door, and turned the handle and pushed, but h was locked. He fired at the lock, and the door sagged. He forced it open, and staggered inside, but heard and saw nothing; neither the swarthy man nor a dead Pillitzer.

He had been so sure that he would find Pillitzer with two bullets in him, silent in death.

The door led to a small room crowded with furniture, dark

because the drapes were drawn, smelling of tobacco smoke and whisky; a third floor dungeon. A couch of crimson, its colour dimmed in the gloom, stretched across a corner, the other furniture looked old and poor by comparison. A 21' television took up another corner.

A second door stood open, and Goodison went to it, cautiously — gun poised, heart pounding; death could be very close. He kicked the door open.

No one shot him.

He did not see Pillitzer.

This was the bedroom, and Pillitzer wasn't here.

Goodison heard men on the stairs and saw one, the local Precinct lieutenant, coming in.

"Make sure they're ready at the back," Goodison rasped, and thrust forward into a kitchen. This was empty, too. A door leading to an iron fire-escape was open, and the sun showed outside in a strip of fire beyond the door. Goodison reached the door and clattered on to the iron platform to look at a forest of television antennae, slates, chimneys, yards where one tree grew and washing hung, and where windows were wide open with women sitting at them, silently breathing in the hot air.

There was the swarthy man, at the foot, running. Two Precinct men were moving towards him, cautiously, guns ready; and his gun showed.

He threw it down.

Goodison felt like screaming: "Where's Pillitzer?" Then he saw the two Precinct men close on the swarthy man in triumph, and at the identical moment Pillitzer appeared from a ground floor doorway, and ran past the Precinct men, who were taken completely by surprise. Goodison fired but missed, then raced down the fire-escape.

Pillitzer turned and fired at him. Goodison felt the bite of a

bullet in his arm; it stopped him. Pillitzer disappeared, with a Precinct man after him, but Goodison was hurt and bitter in the realisation that he had been outwitted. The swarthy man and his gun shots had been a decoy to help Pillitzer escape.

"Where are you hurt?" the Precinct lieutenant demanded in a soft but urgent voice. "I can see the blood on your pants, and —"

"I'm not hurt," Goodison was sharp-voiced. "For God's sake get Pillitzer."

A second door stood open, and Goodison went to it, cautiously — gun poised, heart pounding; death could be very close. He kicked the door open.

No one shot him.

He did not see Pillitzer.

This was the bedroom, and Pillitzer wasn't here.

Goodison heard men on the stairs and saw one, the local Precinct lieutenant, coming in.

"Make sure they're ready at the back," Goodison rasped, and thrust forward into a kitchen. This was empty, too. A door leading to an iron fire-escape was open, and the sun showed outside in a strip of fire beyond the door. Goodison reached the door and clattered on to the iron platform to look at a forest of television antennae, slates, chimneys, yards where one tree grew and washing hung, and where windows were wide open with women sitting at them, silently breathing in the hot air.

There was the swarthy man, at the foot, running. Two Precinct men were moving towards him, cautiously, guns ready; and his gun showed.

He threw it down.

Goodison felt like screaming: "Where's Pillitzer?" Then he saw the two Precinct men close on the swarthy man in triumph, and at the identical moment Pillitzer appeared from a ground floor doorway, and ran past the Precinct men, who were taken

completely by surprise. Goodison fired but missed, then raced down the fire-escape.

Pillitzer turned and fired at him. Goodison felt the bite of a bullet in his arm; it stopped him. Pillitzer disappeared, with a Precinct man after him, but Goodison was hurt and bitter in the realisation that he had been outwitted. The swarthy man and his gun shots had been a decoy to help Pillitzer escape.

"Where are you hurt?" the Precinct lieutenant demanded in a soft but urgent voice. "I can see the blood on your pants, and —"

"I'm not hurt," Goodison was sharp-voiced. "For God's sake get Pillitzer."

A wound in the arm made a man feel faint and sick. Or was it the bitterness of failure?

"Let me see," the local man insisted, and a moment later he looked at an ugly wound and the welling blood. "You're hurt bad," he announced. "You have to see a doctor."

"We want Pillitzer," Goodison could not speak as savagely as he wanted to.

"Sure, we'll get him," the other soothed. "You don't need to worry, Lootenant. We've got the other guy and we'll get Pillitzer."

***

The swarthy man lost no time in talking. Pillitzer had hired him to watch, warn him if the police came, and to distract them. He had done just that. He would get three years. He would not or could not say where Pillitzer had gone.

When Pillitzer's wife came home, she gave them no help at all.

***

They took Goodison to hospital.

Tollifer himself telephoned Rose, soothed the anxiety from her voice, assured her that it was only a flesh wound, and her husband would want to remain on duty. That wouldn't be wise, and he

needed at least forty-eight hours stand-off. Tollifer was sure that Mrs Goodison understood.

"Isn't he bad enough to take a week?" asked Rose.

"It's obvious you understand me," Tollifer said. "Thank you, Mrs Goodison. You need not worry at all."

He rang off, lifted his telephone, and checked that the police watches on the bridges, tunnels and ferries as well as the airfields were extended to include Pillitzer as well as Ashley, and set every patrolman the Precincts could spare and every available detective from Grade 3 up hunting for both missing men. He did it all quietly. He talked to a dozen Precinct captains himself, pushing them so that they did not know they were being pushed. Pillitzer's known friends were checked, every relation he had was questioned. By nightfall, o»:er fifty raids had been made on reported hiding-places, all without result.

Telisa Rapelli was questioned for an hour and a half, without yielding any information of value. She could not believe that the killer was Michael Ashley, and did not yet know why the police were after Pillitzer. No, she had not known Pillitzer, nor had her father, but of course they had known of him.

The newspapers weren't on the Pillitzer angle yet, but very soon would be, and then they would screech it to the wide world. Sylvester made dignified protest after protest. All the salesmen at the Rapelli Galleries were questioned, and the galleries were closed for business.

At eight o'clock that night, Goodison was home and in bed, resenting it, when the front door bell rang. Sadie was out, at a late class. Rose hurried to the door, and Goodison found his heart pounding with a kind of fear he knew was unreasonable, but which existed.

He heard Hank Jensen's voice.

"Send him in," he called, and jerked himself up on his pillows

as the Swede entered, with Rose just behind.

"You can't stay long," she declared. "The doctor ordered a complete night's rest. You shouldn't have come."

"This way, I'll rest," Goodison said. "How about a can of beer for our guest? What've we got, Hank?"

It was obvious to both Jensen and to Rose that nothing but the case really mattered to Goodison.

"We haven't got anything new," Hank told him. "We haven't got Pillitzer or Ashley, but we've a load of heat and humidity promised tomorrow. If you were smart you'd get Rose to drive you up state."

"I don't trust her driving. Any news from London?"

"If you can call it news. After getting your cable, they've checked and discovered that five years ago Telisa Rapelli was married to a man named Clint, Jeremy Clint, in Chelsea, London, England. There's no record of any divorce anywhere in England. We've cabled everything we have, and the Yard is cabling us the same way. There's a personal message from that Superintendent West."

"He's been promoted? What does he say?"

"He hopes the wound isn't serious, and you'll be able to finish the job yourself."

"That sounds like West," Goodison said. He looked tired out. There were dark patches beneath his eyes, although they glittered with eagerness. "We've got to show Scotland Yard that we're good. I've been thinking about Telisa Rapelli. I want you to check whether she and her father often quarrelled, how she took this sacrifice for Pa's sake — the lot. Use Mason and dig deep. And there's this: you needn't tell Tollifer about it yet. A lot of funny business could be going on under the eyes of a blind man. Maybe Telisa didn't sacrifice so much. Find out, Hank."

"Sure."

“Any news of Michael Ashley?” Goodison demanded.

“I told you, no,” said Hank. He stood up. “Ivan, I’m on my way.”

“Why don’t you stop acting as if you were married?” Goodison demanded, but Rose was standing close by him and he gripped her hand. “Okay. Let me know what you find out as early in the morning as you can. If you cable Scotland Yard, tell West I’m mighty fine.” He managed a grin.

“Yes, suh, yo’ mighty fine,” Jensen fooled.

“If the Michael Ashley guy is located at Idlewild, don’t keep him here, send him back where he belongs,” Goodison said, and grinned. “Call me if you find Pillitzer, I regard him as kind of personal.”

***

Goodison slept through the night.

The cables between Headquarters, New York, and New Scotland Yard had a quiet spell, too. The pace of the hunt for Pillitzer slackened with the darkness, and he was not found. Nor was Michael Ashley. The newspapers all discovered the significance of the police hunt for Pillitzer in the same breath and the scream hit every tabloid front page, as well as radio and video; it even robbed the commercials of some of their time. Was the British killer the real killer, or was Pillitzer standing in for him? And why kill an English beauty and an American antique dealer? If they had not been killed by the same man, had they been killed for the same motive, and what was that motive?

There were several guesses in big black type. Telisa could inherit the fabulously successful business of Rapelli’s but that made Telisa her own father’s murderer. That each victim had shared a secret, and had been killed to conceal the fact. That there was a psycho on the prowl. That. . .

Jensen spent most of the night doing what Goodison had

asked him. The Precinct men had picked up plenty of rumours; Rapelli and his daughter had quarrelled bitterly at times, and Rapelli had been a devil to live with.

More people knew of his failing sight than he had dreamed.

In spite of his night work, Jensen was at Headquarters on time next morning.

"You've been working on this since it began," Tollifer said to him, at ten am when the reports were being sifted. "You can keep at it, Sergeant, but don't fall down on any part of the job. If you run into trouble or anything you don't understand, report to me at once."

"Sure, Captain."

"What are your opinions, Sergeant?"

Jensen's face was absolutely straight; there were some things he could say, some he preferred to keep for Goodison.

"To me, it looks a very confused situation, Captain, and yet I can understand most of it." Tollifer sat at his desk, as if dressed for a parade of veterans, sharp-eyed, sharp-faced, never a man to play with. "I can understand how Pillitzer got away, but I didn't know he was that smart. I think maybe the man who stooged for him could talk, but I don't know how to make him. There's a Precinct report saying he had been in the money since the day before yesterday, and that squares with Pillitzer hiring him." Jensen was standing straight as a pine from the forests of Sweden and his hair was like Swedish corn, bleached by the sun. "There's big money behind this, Captain — money enough to pay Pillitzer, to pay his stooge, probably to pay for whoever is keeping Pillitzer under cover. I don't know whose money it is, but one of the things Goodison planned to do was look for the money behind it."

Tollifer nodded.

"What is it you don't understand?" It was impossible to be sure whether there was sarcasm in his voice or not.

“Why we haven’t found the Englishman, Ashley,” answered Jensen. “Englishmen aren’t so easy to hide. They look different, they speak different, they behave different. This guy appeared at the airport under the name of Marshall Abbott, but no one saw him leave, no taxi driver remembers him, no airport porter saw him. He arrived at Idlewild and went through customs with one suitcase, and after that he vanished. He appears to have been at the Rapelli apartment, we’ve fingerprint evidence of that.”

“Are you doubting fingerprint evidence?” Now Tollifer was cool.

“No, sir, he was at the apartment sure enough, but we don’t know when it was. We can’t trace that he was there a week or ten days ago, but that could be the case. He could have made that print any time up to two, even three, weeks ago. Rapelli was on his own, and one of the women who worked at the apartment has been known to put glasses and crockery away without cleaning it properly.”

Tollifer interrupted sharply: “Are you stating facts?”

“Yes, sir, I talked to Fingerprints.”

“Proceed.”

“Thank you, sir. A man can be in London one night, in New York the next, back in London the third. We have indications, thanks to Goodison’s inquiries, that Pillitzer might have been the killer here, not Michael Ashley. If Pillitzer wasn’t, why did he run away? What’s he afraid of?” Tollifer made no answer, and Jensen went on: “Ashley might be able to prove an alibi, and since his print could have been made weeks ago, we might not be able to break the alibi.”

“Exactly what are you driving at, Sergeant?”

“I’m asking myself this: did Michael Ashley come to New York for a few hours, using the name of Abbott, and did he fly right back to Britain, or did he go to the coast, or did he fly down to South

America? He wouldn't need a passport for the coast or anywhere in the United States, so he could use any name. I'd like to alert all those places for him, I wouldn't take it for granted that he was still in New York."

Tollifer said: "And you've discussed this with Goodison?"

"By telephone this morning, and he agrees it is worth investigating."

"It's all of that," said Tollifer, and gave one of his rare smiles. "It looks as if someone's going to be disappointed. This time I'll talk to Scotland Yard myself." He pushed a report across the desk. "This just came in," he said. "Telisa Rapelli had a Reno divorce from a man named Jeremy Clint, three years ago. And Clint was an Englishman."

"That'll help to keep the Yard busy," said Jensen.

Part III

LONDON — SECOND PHASE

10

Cold Day

ROGER WEST pushed back the bedclothes, got out of his bed, and shivered. Janet turned over, and curled up her body, as if she was cold. Outside, at seven o'clock, it was grey, and the greyness took away the colour of the flowers and the brightness of the leaves and the lawns in Bell Street.

"What a day for June," he grumbled, and dragged a winter-weight dressing-gown on.

There was no sound from either of his sons, Martin or Richard. They could lie in for another twenty minutes, but he wanted to be at the Yard very early this morning. He shaved and washed, went downstairs and made tea, then took the newspapers out of the letter-box: the *Daily Sketch* and the *Daily Express*.

The *Express* headline was about the Middle East. The *Sketch* had a busty damsel beneath the big letters:

SLASHER BACK IN LONDON?

Police Headquarters in New York believe that the unknown killer of Miss Margaret Roy in London and of Gorgio Rapelli in New York's exclusive Madison Avenue Gallery is back in London. . . .

Roger went into the front room. The curtains were back, because the room had not been used the previous night. The furniture was shabby, with one or two small, new pieces, and a dark Bechstein baby grand which didn't look shabby even though it was scratched. He picked up the telephone, dialled the Yard, and squatted on the arm of an easy chair which had a linen loose cover. He could hear the kettle boiling, and the ringing at the Yard. Then:

"New Scotland Yard."

"Is Mr Kimbell in his office?" Roger asked.

“Just a moment, Mr West.”

Roger stared at the greyness and a slight beading of rain on the windows. A gust of wind swept the laden heads of antirrhinums and phlox down. The grass wanted cutting, the boys would have to be spurred on to that. Little beggars. He smiled at the thought of them, and then Superintendent Kimbell who had been on duty last night, came on the line.

“That you, Handsome?”

“Yes. Kimmy, what’s in from New York?”

“Late last night Captain Tollifer of Police Headquarters telephoned the Commander. Ever heard of Tollifer?”

“I met him once. What did he have to say?”

“That he thinks Ashley may have doubled back to London.”

My God!

“That all?”

“It’s the only thing Hardy sent through to me, but he said he’d see you first thing this morning.”

“What’ve you done?”

“Tightened the night watch on James Wickham, Vanity Roy and everyone else involved,” Kimbell answered. “Put word out to all Divisions and Home Counties, and asked the airport police to check. Telisa Rapelli was divorced from this Jeremy Clint in Reno, according to Tollifer, and we’ve got a call out for Clint. Not much else we could do by night.”

“It’s plenty. Any idea what time Hardy will be in?”

“He’s an early bird, often sees me before I leave.”

“Like to do something for me?”

“If I can.”

“Send a selection of photographs of Michael Ashley to London Airport for me. I’ll pick ‘em up in an hour.”

“Right,” said Kimbell, and added drily, “I wouldn’t put it past those New York chaps to pass the buck.”

“Think they’re good at it over there, too?” asked Roger. “Thanks a lot, Kimmy.” He rang off, held the telephone platform down For a moment, then lifted it and heard the buzz. He dialled Warren Turnbull’s Mayfair number. Turnbull was in the Force because he wanted to be, not because he needed to earn a living; his money probably increased his mortification about his wife, for he dressed her extravagantly.

This call might irritate him; or it might make him feel that he was not being squeezed out. The ringing sound went on for fully a minute, before Turnbull said roughly:

“Turnbull here.”

“West,” announced Roger. “No need to jump out of bed, but I’m going over to London Airport and don’t know when I’ll be at the office. Have you a pencil handy?”

“I’ve a memory.” That was sharp.

“Right,” said Roger. “There’s a possibility that Ashley doubled back to England. With Rapelli killed in New York, we don’t know if there’ll be more on the list and we can’t afford to let Ashley get away again.”

Turnbull said: “That’s how good New York cops are.” So he wasn’t in any better mood, but Roger let it pass.

“We’d better check everyone who knows Ashley, socially and in business,” he said. “Check all the regular customers of the Old World Gallery, all the restorers who work for him if he puts restoring out, any runners he uses, picture frame makers, the lot.”

“I’ve had a man doing that for twenty-four hours.”

He hadn’t asked permission, but Roger made himself say:

“Good. We want the complete picture of Ashley’s life and recent activities,” Roger went on. “We also want a complete list of all sales made through the Gallery to the United States, especially to Rapelli. All clear?”

“Most of it should be on tap when I get to the office,” Turn-

bull said. “By half-past eight.”

“I want as much as you can give me by ten.”

“You’ll get it all. Before I ring off, here’s an item,” Turnbull said. “Margaret Roy got a business allowance of dollars to go to America — as a representative of Old World.”

“That’s something to know. Anything in about Vanity Roy?”

“No one tried to burn her flat down,” Turnbull answered. “She’s all right with our chaps on the watch.”

“She’d better be. Thanks.” Roger rang off, and hurried to the kitchen; it was as full of steam as a boiler house with a leaky valve. He turned down the gas, made tea, slammed it on a tray and hurried upstairs. The thought of Ashley being back in England drove the Turnbull problem to the back of his mind. He poured himself a cup of tea as Janet stirred, and sipped as he looked down at her. Her dark hair was pushed to one side where she had been sleeping, her bare shoulders were slightly tanned. She looked good, even without make-up.

“You up?”

“Got to get a move on,” Roger said. “I’ll grab some porridge, and call the boys.” He finished his tea, kissed Janet on the forehead, slid his hand down the front of her nightdress and grimaced at her. Then he hurried into his clothes.

She sat up.

“Give me five minutes to wake up, and I’ll come and cook your breakfast.”

“No time,” Roger said. Knotting his tie, he went along to the boys, banged on the door, saw them moving sluggishly when he looked in, and called brightly: “Afternoon, boys, time for bed!” Scoopy, the elder, grunted. Richard the younger turned over. All Roger saw was the top of their heads and their foreheads, Scoopy’s hair sticking out like a gollywog’s, Richard’s, darker, shorter, tidy. “Come on, show a leg,” he insisted, “you can have five minutes. I

have to get off early."

"Oh, *Dad*." That was Scoopy. "You always do."

Now Richard opened his eyes wide.

"We've hardly had time to congratulate you since you became a superintendent," Scoopy continued, complaining with weary dignity. "Is it always going to be like this now?"

"Your mother thinks so," Roger said cheerfully. "I may be home early tonight." He went back into the bedroom, shrugged himself into his jacket, made sure everything he needed was in his pockets, kissed Janet on the tip of the nose, and then hurried down the stairs. He sliced bread, slapped on some butter, and ate it in three mouthfuls. He was still swallowing when he took the car out of the garage. A film of June's rain spread everywhere, the morning looked bleaker than it had when he had got up; it was raining more heavily.

His car was a black Humber Hawk, fairly new.

It was five to eight.

He turned left, towards Fulham, and drove well above the thirty mile an hour limit. Every turn of the wheels took him further away from the Yard. He went past the rows of closed shops in Fulham Palace Road, with hundreds of cyclists coming towards him, and a few going in the other direction; London's early birds travelled by bicycle. The motors aiding many of them pop-pop-popped ceaselessly. He reached the junction at Hammersmith, and then headed west, for the London Airport.

Only here and there a newspaper shop or dairy was open. Traffic going out of London hardly existed. He reached the end of the little rows of houses, swung round the big roundabout, and reached the Great West Road. Now he really put his foot down. The lights were kind, he stopped only twice before reaching the airport, and he was there at twelve minutes past eight. He went to the main entrance, finding the public car park was empty; the park outside

the main building had only a few dozen cars, and the Queen's Building looked shut up and deserted. But aeroplane engines were roaring, and a big aircraft was coming in to land; he saw it disappear behind the Queen's Building.

He was recognised by the men outside at the airport police office.•

"Who's on duty?" he asked, briskly. "Mr Wade?"

"Yes, sir, came in five minutes ago."

The building still had a touch of newness, inside as well as out, but tell-tale marks were already on the walls and the floors. The superintendent's door was open. A week ago, Roger would have tapped, even if he hadn't sent word to say that he was waiting; now he put his head round the door. Wade, a shortish, plump man, with jet black hair and a heavy blue jowl which suggested southern Europe, was looking at a large envelope, as he stood by his desk.

"Morning," Roger said. "Spare me a minute?"

"Caw!" Wade glanced up. "Who's bought you a new alarm clock?" He flipped the envelope up and down. "This is for you."

"For you," Roger corrected. "They're photographs of Michael Ashley, front, back and sideways, I hope."

"Don't tell me any more, I know it all. Will I have them taken round to every customs official, every copper and every clerk, to find out if they recognise him?"

"Not bad," conceded Roger. "Nearly right, too." He offered cigarettes, but Wade shook his head. "Over a six months period though, not just in the past week or so."

"If you smoke those things in the morning you'll be coughing yourself sick by the time you're fifty," Wade said. "Why six months? Don't say these New York wide boys have fooled you into believing that Ashley's back here."

"That's the second crack about New York police I've heard this morning," Roger said. "What are you sour about? Police quarters at

Idlewild or La Guardia more comfortable than here?"

"I've got the best in the world," Wade boasted, but there was a glint in his eye. "It wouldn't be surprising if New York preferred to wish him on to us, though, would it?"

"I've some queer ideas," Roger said. "I think they're doing a job the same way as we are, and if they could catch Ashley after we let him slip through our fingers, they'd grin all over their faces."

"All pals together, eh?"

"All cops together. If New York thinks Ashley came back, there's a damned good chance that he did. The fact that they can't find a wanted Englishman in or near New York makes it obviously possible that he got away. How difficult would we find it to trace any American we wanted?"

"Shouldn't take long, but don't forget he may have killed himself, and there's even a chance he's been murdered. There's this man Pillitzer to be reckoned with now."

"New York's just as aware as we are that he might be dead," Roger said almost irritably. "They know the killer might be after more victims, too."

"Any reason to think so?" Wade demanded, and then added before Roger could answer: "Sorry — fool question. Worried about Vanity Roy?"

"I'm worried about everyone in the case, but that's not why I'm here. Jim, when I heard that Ashley had gone to the airport with a ticket and passport in his own name, and turned up in New York as Marshall Abbott, with ticket and passport in that name, one thing stood out a mile. It probably wasn't the first time he'd flown the Atlantic under an assumed name. If he's used one alias, what's to say that he hasn't used others? And what's the reason? Smuggling? It that the trouble?"

"That's right, pass the buck," complained Wade. "But it's not an original thought. Turnbull was on the phone just before you

arrived, on the same idea."

Roger said: "He gets around."

Wade shook out the photographs of Michael Ashley. There he was, sleek black hair, thin features, lean cheeks, big eyes; a dark hawk of a man. In profile, his nose was very noticeable. "If he's been going in and out of the airport under different names it shouldn't be hard to trace," Wade went on. "Even a blind man should be able to recognise him."

"How long will it be before you can give me a comprehensive report?"

"Some time this afternoon."

"That's fine!" Roger took a pencil from his pocket. "Got a piece of paper?" He wrote swiftly. "Here are the approximate dates when Ashley is known to have travelled to the States this last twelve months — the last time was in late May. We want actual dates on which he travelled, and it would be worth looking for passengers with initials M. A. If he used the same initials once, he might make a habit of it: that always helps with baggage and clothing."

"I'll see what I can do," Wade promised, and went on: "Think he and his cousin are smuggling old paintings to the States? Turnbull hinted at it. There's a big market, and export control over anything worth more than five hundred quid is an open invitation to smuggling."

"Could be," Roger conceded. "We'll ask New York to check how many pictures Rapelli's have been getting and compare the total with legal exports from here. Turnbull's working on this end."

"That right Telisa Rapelli was married in this country and divorced in Reno?" Wade asked.

"Yes, to and from a man named Jeremy Clint," Roger answered. "We haven't got a line on Clint yet, and Telisa Rapelli won't tell the New York Police where he is even if she knows.

Thanks for listening, Jim. Let me know if you get any quick answers."

"Yes."

Roger went off as another plane came in, so low that he could see the wording on the fuselage plainly. TWA. Trans- World Airlines. How often had Michael Ashley travelled across the Atlantic — how often had Wickham flown across? "I'm still only half awake," Roger growled to himself. "I ought to have had copies of James Wickham's photographs sent to the airport, too." If he wanted Wickham checked, Wade would have to go over all the same ground again.

Traffic was a congealed mass of small and large cars and the occasional big lorry, now crawling together, now sprinting together, along the three lane road to the Great West Road, then on to the four lanes leading to London. The four lanes on the other side were almost empty. Roger didn't worry much about the traffic. Turnbull doing a lone wolf act could be dangerous and it was now glaringly obvious that he wanted to score a triumph — over him, Roger, and over New York. Roger wished Goodison hadn't been injured, and wondered how badly he was hurt. Goodison wouldn't have talked to Hardy, but the important thing was that Turnbull shouldn't talk to anyone in New York.

Ought he even to be kept on the case?

A radio flash came for him from Information.

"West speaking," Roger said.

"Word has just come in that a man named Clint was once on Margaret Roy's visiting list," Information said.

"Ah! Thanks. That the lot?"

"Yes, sir."

"Thanks."

Roger didn't go straight to New Scotland Yard after that, but turned into Hyde Park at Hyde Park Corner, and then out into Park

Lane, near the Dorchester. The Roy sisters had lived in one of the mews flats in Mayfair, quite near Park Lane. Traffic was frustratingly thick, and there was no room to park anywhere, although it wasn't yet ten o'clock. He turned into the mews, and pulled up outside a garage with a No Parking notice planted outside it. A man in overalls strolled over from a small garage, rubbing his hands on some oily rags.

"Hallo, Hewitson," Roger greeted.

"Morning, sir," said Detective Officer Hewitson.

"Anything doing?"

"Nothing at all, sir. I've just reported to Mr Turnbull."

"I thought you'd been told not to leave here," Roger was sharp.

"I didn't, sir. Mr Turnbull called on Miss Roy half an hour ago."

Roger thought almost viciously: "I'll break his neck before I'm through," but kept a straight face, and asked:

"What's happened?"

"Miss Roy went for her usual ten minutes walk about half-past eight; just after, the maid came in, about nine o'clock. The postman delivered three letters; just after, he left. Otherwise, nothing at all. Miss Roy collected her own milk, of course, always has a pint and a half."

"Probably feeds her complexion on it," Roger said. "You can have a cup of tea and a smoke for twenty minutes."

"Thanks very much, sir," Hewitson went back to the garage more briskly than he had left it. Roger, still fuming, walked up the five stone steps which led to the front door of the mews flat. Turnbull might have angered Vanity Roy, and made her difficult. It was very quiet here, except For the whine of traffic in the distance, and the occasional tap-tap- tap of a woman walking. The front door was black and yellow, like the paint at the windows. He rang the

bell and waited;

there was no answer. He rang again, and began to feel that measure of unease which came so quickly on this case. He rang for a third time, telling himself that nothing could have gone wrong.

He heard footsteps, quick and light.

Vanity Roy opened the door.

She had always been beautiful, but never quite so ravishing. Her black hair was fluffy and almost like a cloud above her lovely face and her superb peach-bloom complexion. Her eyes looked enormous. She wore a gold-coloured housecoat, fastened high at the neck but so shaped to her figure that it might have been moulded. She had a small mouth with the beautifully curved lips parted a little as if in annoyance.

“Good morning, Miss Roy.”

“Not again,” she protested, then stood aside for him to pass. It was impossible to judge whether there was still fear in her eyes. She led the way into a room overlooking a small walled garden, with a grass patch and several beds of flowers; a grey film covered it and the green of the grass had a muddy look. An electric fire glowed, taking off the room’s chill.

It was a tricky situation. Roger didn’t know what Turn- bull had asked her, was anxious to find out, but could hardly put a direct question. He needed an explanation for this second call, too.

“Sorry to pester you,” he said briskly, “but I need to find out what dates your sister and your cousins have been out of the country.”

“I’ve already told the other man all I know,” Vanity protested. “As I’m not in the business, I’m not really sure.”

What else had Turnbull come to ask? The obvious need was to find out if Michael Ashley had been in touch with Vanity, and to warn her to tell the Yard if he did; Turnbull had almost certainly asked that. Had he asked about Clint, too?

Roger found himself hesitating as he wondered how much Turnbull knew; but he had to justify his visit, and fume against Turnbull later.

"Do you know a man named Clint, Miss Roy v

She looked blank.

"No."

"Have you ever heard of the name?"

"I don't think so. Who is he?"

"Telisa Rapelli's ex-husband."

"Oh," said Vanity. "I knew she was once married, but she always used her maiden name in business. I didn't know her married name."

"Did you know her husband?"

"No, obviously."

"Did your cousins?"

"I don't know," said Vanity Roy, and then surprised Roger by saying vehemently, "If I can do anything to help you find the murderer, I will. *Anything.* I promised the other man, what's-his-name? — Turnbull. Apart from wanting to avenge my sister, I — I'm badly scared."

"Of course you are. Are you sure you don't know who might want to kill you?"

"I know it's been said before but I didn't think I had an enemy in the world," Vanity declared. "I was sure that my sister hadn't, either."

"Do your cousins stand to gain by your death?"

"No," answered Vanity vigorously. "And I don't believe either of them knows anything about this."

"If you remember or find out anything that might possibly help, call me at the Yard, or even my home, at any time. Both numbers are on here." Roger gave her a card, turned to go, and didn't look back until he reached the door. When he glanced over

his shoulder, she was staring at the card, and looking as if she could not make up her mind whether to call him back or not.

Did she know something which she hadn't admitted?

He opened the door and went out.

She didn't follow, and didn't call after him.

Hewitson was back at the garage, and this time did not move towards Roger, who went to his car. But before he climbed in, a two-tone grey Rolls Bentley turned into the mews, and Roger saw James Wickham drawing up alongside.

11

Danger for Vanity Roy ?

ROLLS BENTLEYS cost a lot of money. It might be said that Wickham had his prestige as an artist to consider, but he was not one of the big fee earners; he had behaved as if the loss of a few canvases had been a body blow. So where did he get his money?

He was dressed immaculately in dark grey, the trousers with a razor edge. He carried a furled umbrella and a curly- brimmed bowler hat, which he put over his greying hair as he stepped towards the flat. Roger stood to one side, protected from the rain by a small porch roof, and Wickham drew level with him. Wickham was an inch shorter, and he looked as if he had just come from a board meeting of a million pounds company. He was almost astonishingly regal in appearance, and there was arrogance as well as distinction in his manner.

His hooked nose helped to give him an imperious air.

He and his cousin were alike only in that hooked nose. Like someone else, Roger thought, and then realised who: like Rapelli.

Vanity Roy came to the door of the flat, as Roger greeted Wickham: “Good morning, sir.”

“Morning.” Wickham strode towards Vanity. “Didn’t you say you’d already had one policeman already today?”

“Yes,” Vanity answered. “But —”

“West, I will have you know that if you or your men pester Miss Roy in this way I shall take the matter up with your superiors,” Wickham said, cutting across her words. “You have to make inquiries, but you have no need to worry her every other minute.”

Roger’s eyes seemed to light up the grey morning.

“Mr Wickham,” he said, “one of your cousins was viciously murdered, another brutally attacked. Yet another has disappeared in peculiar circumstances. I don’t know yet whether he lied, and I

don't know whether you lied, but I do know that Mr Ashley had the opportunity to commit both crimes. So did you."

Wickham drew in a sharp breath.

"If you've an easy conscience and any sense, you'll both decide to tell the whole truth," Roger went on. "And if Mr Ashley gets in touch with you, advise the Yard at once."

"I'll soon put you in your place," Wickham said, but there was no bite in his voice.

Roger turned and went unhurriedly to his car. He didn't look round, but heard the flat door slam.

Hewitson had watched all this with obvious interest, but Roger didn't acknowledge him this time, just went straight to his car and flicked on the radio.

"Information Room," came the response, promptly.

"West here. Put me on to Chief Inspector Turnbull, quickly."

"Yes, sir."

"Turnbull here," Turnbull said a moment later.

"I'm at Vanity Roy's flat, and Wickham's here," Roger said. "I want him followed so that he knows we're on his tail."

"Think you've got 'em on the run?"

"It wouldn't surprise me."

"What would?" Turnbull demanded, and went on with suspicious silkiness: "That old Gossen of Portobello Road does most of the restoring and framing for the Old World Gallery, for instance?"

Roger didn't speak.

"Remember me?" demanded Turnbull. "I was talking about Gossen, who knows more about faking pictures than any man in London. I've been after that angle ever since a picture smuggling and faking racket looked like the answer."

"Send a cable to New York — and address it to Tollifer,"

Roger ordered. “Ask them to have all the paintings known to have been sent over by Old World examined by an expert, and let us know the result.”

“I’ve got the cable written out,” Turnbull said smugly.

“I can tell you another thing. A certain Jeremy Clint, alias Clinton, served three years for fraud before Telisa Rapelli married him. We know him as Clinton, and he’s got a record, we ought to get on to him soon.” Turnbull’s voice became exaggeratedly formal. “The Commander would like to see Superintendent West immediately he puts in an appearance this morning.”

“Tell him I’ll be there in half an hour,” Roger said. “Anything worth reporting from the Old World Gallery?”

“No. We’re still watching it back and front.”

“Wickham’s studio and Ashley’s flat and office?”

“Ditto.”

“Right,” said Roger. He flicked off and lit a cigarette, glad that he hadn’t been tempted to reprimand Turnbull over the air. It was a hell of a business to be forced to keep an eye on one of his own men, and it might become a dangerous distraction. Turnbull wasn’t doing badly, though. If he solved this case by himself he would gloat; either way, he would be unbearable.

“The main thing is that he doesn’t mess the job up,” Roger said *sotto voce.*

Five minutes after he had stopped talking to Turnbull, a car passed the entrance to the mews. Roger started his engine, and drove into the street where the bulky detective officer named Brown was already standing and watching a squad car drive off.

Turnbull seemed to anticipate what was wanted.

Roger stopped alongside Brown.

“Keep on Wickham’s tail,” he ordered. “Get a taxi, and hire it for the day if necessary. Harass him all you can but don’t give him any cause for complaint.”

"Right, sir!"

"And don't lose him."

"Be sure of that, sir!"

But Brown knew as well as Roger that if a man wanted to dodge the police tailer, it wasn't difficult. Would Wickham take the risk? Could he be irritated into making some false move?

Roger waited until a cab came and Brown got in, then drove to New Bond Street. Here parking wasn't simply difficult, it was impossible. He pulled in on the taxi rank outside a hotel in a side street, and a police constable and a porter bore down on him to tell him of his sin. The porter recognised him first, and gave him freedom of the forecourt.

"I won't be long," Roger said. "Thanks. How long have you been here?"

"Ever since we opened, sir, three years ago."

"Do you remember a Miss Rapelli, from New York?"

"Yes, sir, I remember her well." The porter was short, thickset and very sure of himself. "Remember her father, too, very sad about him, isn't it?"

"How often did they stay here?"

"Two or three times most years."

"Thanks," said Roger. He went into the hotel, and it took five minutes to arrange with the manager to let him have a list of the visits made by the Rapellis, and a note of any other residents who had received pictures from the Old World Gallery. Then Roger walked briskly round to the gallery itself. A cold wind cut along the street; this might have been November, not June. He turned into the gallery, wondering how it compared with Rapelli's. The front shop was small, but a long, L-shaped extension was at the back, and a staircase leading to a cellar show-room, where the exhibitions were held. Two assistants were on duty, a middle-aged man with a round face and a round nose and very bright blue eyes, and an

attractive girl in her twenties.

"Good morning, sir." The man was aloof.

"Good morning." The girl barely smiled.

"Morning," said Roger, holding his hat in his hand. "Did you hold the correspondence for Mr Ashley?"

"Yes, sir, but Mr Wickham says that you've no right to claim it."

"Until we find Mr Ashley we've every right," Roger said. "Don't make difficulties." The man fetched the letters from a drawer in a Regency table. There were three. "Thanks." Roger opened each one, but none helped. He put them back in their envelopes and returned them. "Has Mr Ashley been in touch with you?"

"No, sir." The man answered, and the girl shook her head.

Were they likely to take risks for their employer?

Roger heard a van draw up outside, and the assistant hurried forward as the driver jumped down. Both men came in, each carrying a picture; and they went back for two more each. Roger saw the van was marked: *M. Meyer, Carriers, Specialists in Fine Art Transport. Shipment, anywhere in the world.* He made a mental note of that, then studied the un- framed canvases, all small landscapes with colourful figures in the foreground, standing against the wall. They had the look of old oil paintings. Did the secret of the murders lay hidden in these or others like them?

"What are these?" Roger asked.

"They're just back from the restorer's, pan of the next consignment for Rapelli's, sir," the assistant explained. "Mr Wickham doesn't expect the tragedy in New York to interfere with business for long."

. "Probably not," Roger agreed. "Thanks. Who restored these pictures?"

"Gossen's of Portobello Road, sir."

So there was no attempt at concealment.

“Does Meyer do all your shipments?”

“Most of them, sir. They’re a very good firm.”

“Thanks,” Roger said. “If Mr Ashley gets in touch with you, let the Yard know at once.”

“Of course, sir.”

The round eyes, the round button of a nose, the round face, were so guileless that Roger found himself wondering if anyone could be as innocent as this man sounded.

“Now that Mr Ashley is away and Miss Roy dead, who is in charge?” Roger asked.

“Mr Wickham, of course.”

“What about Miss Vanity Roy?”

“She’s never had anything to do with the business,” the assistant told him. “In fact she only came to the shop occasionally, and that was to call for Miss Margaret.”

“Thanks,” said Roger. “Do you know a Mr Jeremy Clint or Clinton?”

There was hardly a pause, before both man and girl said no.

It had been a poor morning, worse because Roger had been treading on Turnbull’s heels all the time. Moodily, he drove back to the Yard and his office, where Naylor’s assistant was at his desk. He greeted:

“The Commander would like to see you, sir.”

“Yes, thanks. Where’s Mr Turnbull?”

“In the Information Room. He’s arranged those extra tails you asked for. Worried about Vanity Roy?”

Roger said: “Badly worried. Here’s a job for you. There are six paintings at the Old World Gallery, ready for shipment to Rapelli’s in New York. Arrange for Mr Fletcher to take a look at them, and find out if they’re real or faked.”

“Right.”

Roger nodded, then sat at the desk and took out the reports on

the case, including one on Vanity Roy. Educated: Roedean. Presented at Court when 19. Hobbies: horse riding and boating . . . mmm . . . Inherited £21,350 from her mother, five years ago. Everything else seemed to fit in with her story. £21,000 wasn't a big fortune these days; properly invested it would bring her in about 4%, after paying tax. Say, £900 or £1,000 a year. The mews flat cost her £400 a year at least.

Yes, it fitted in.

Her dead sister had been left the same amount of money, but had travelled the world, made a reputation for herself in several capitals, spent in thousands where her sister spent in hundreds. Men? She had been beautiful enough to make a fool of any man, and rich men could be easily parted from their money if they had an eye for a figure.

Had she always travelled on business, after all? Or had she just gone for the advantages of business jaunts?

"The Commander —" the DI reminded him.

Roger jumped up. "Yes, I'm going. Ring through and ask him if it's convenient, will you?" He stood up, waited until the DI nodded, and then went out.

Hardy was sitting at his desk, with a telephone in one hand, a pencil poised in the other. He waved to a chair. Roger didn't sit down, but stepped to the window. This room overlooked the embankment, the river, the plane trees, Westminster Bridge and the London County Hall, and one only had to look a little to one side to see the other bridges. There was the dome of St Paul's, too, a vague shape looming out of the universal grey. Some superintendents also had a room with a view.

There was a ringing sound as Hardy rang off, and Roger turned quickly. It wasn't often that Hardy showed excitement, but he did now.

"I wanted a report and a plan of action," he said, "but that can

wait. Turnbull thinks he's cornered Ashley, in Gossen's shop in Portobello Road. Get over there, will you? Pick up details on the radio."

Roger was already at the door.

12

Cornered

PORTOBELLO ROAD was not a street of beauty at the best of times, but it could teem with life. Now it teemed with rain. The stores and stalls had vanished and the voices of the stall-holders were silent, and most of the second-hand shops were shut. The grey terraced houses near it looked drab and uninviting, many with uncurtained windows, having dark faces at them, dark-faced children in prams inside halls where the doors were open to let in a little light. Here was decayed gentility of district and houses, with here and there one which had been freshly painted, as if in defiance.

The ordinary shops in Portobello Road were open but doing very little trade.

A few bedraggled Jamaicans were standing near a corner where the police had cordoned off the street by using barrow boys' barrows. It was barricaded at the other end, too. No cars were between the barricades. The Jamaicans, many of them bare-headed, looked cold and miserable and yet fascinated.

This was a section of the street given over to antiques, jewellery or 'junk'. Here were pictures, *objets (Tart,* china, trinkets, books, a mass of rubbish which might be hiding a gem of great value. Here, when the market was open, keen- voiced and keen-eyed dealers displayed their wares in the small bazaars or on the stalls outside, and among them was Gossen's.

Gossen's dealt mostly in pictures. Seventy-year-old Gossen himself was one of the keenest buyers in London, and it was said that he could identify the work of an artist quicker and more surely than any recognised sale-room expert. He spent his life among the box rooms and lumber rooms of houses, buying piles of junk for odd shillings, and occasionally getting a picture which was worth a fortune.

He had spent his youth as a runner for dealers, and knew the trade thoroughly. Much of his business was in cleaning and restoring, and for the work he used a big air-raid shelter, virtually a strong-room, at the back of his shop. He had never been caught faking, but on his pay-roll were many men who had.

Roger saw him standing in the doorway of a shop opposite, wearing an old raincoat; rain streamed down his battered trilby hat, a man who looked like a tramp and was probably worth a hundred thousand pounds.

Bishop, of the local Division, was standing with him. Two plainclothes men were at the locked door of the shop itself, but others were standing back, as if they did not relish being so near. Bishop was tall and thin, an angular forty, with knuckly hands and a bony jaw. He was a 'play safe' officer, and didn't take risks with himself or with his men if he could avoid it.

Watching from other doorways and from the street were perhaps twenty plainclothes detectives, including some Flying Squad officers and some Divisional men in uniform. The two by the door were obviously trying to force the lock.

Turnbull wasn't in sight.

Roger said: "Hallo, Bish. Having trouble?"

Bishop turned swiftly.

"I'd like to cut the swine's throat myself."

"What's he done now?"

"Just thrown a Molotov Cocktail at my chaps, two of them have been carted off to hospital."

Roger's heart seemed to miss a beat.

"Badly burned?"

"Shouldn't be too bad, but —" Bishop glared across at the shop, with its boarded windows and its locked door. "How much more damage will he do, that's my worry."

Roger didn't speak.

“Mr West,” said Gossen, moving forward and touching Roger with a talon-like hand which was very pale and almost transparently white, “Mr West, I hope you’ll do all you can to make sure my premises aren’t damaged.”

“Here’s a man with his face burnt, and another with his hand burnt nearly to the bone, and all Gossen can talk about is his bloody shop. I’d tear the place apart If I thought it would do any good.” Bishop looked as savage as he sounded.

“My life’s fortunes are in those premises, Mr West,” Gossen said as if in despair.

“We won’t do any damage we don’t have to,” Roger told him. “What’s the trouble with the lock?”

“He had it made for the Bank of England,” Bishop growled.

“There are a lot of valuable things on those premises, I had to make sure that there was a good lock,” Gossen protested.

Roger asked: “Is Turnbull here?”

“He’s gone to see if he can get in the back way,” Bishop said. “I tore a strip off him. He came round and started ordering my chaps about.”

“Who traced Ashley here?” asked Roger.

“Turnbull started the ball rolling,” Bishop admitted. “It’s not what he does, it’s the way he does it that gets my goat. He called the fire station for help without a by your leave. I—”

A small glass bottle appeared suddenly at a hole in a window, and fell just behind two men at the door. As it burst, a hissing cloud of smoke and a burning liquid which ran about in a dozen directions, giving vicious indications of the awful injury it could do to a human being caused a shocked pause. Then:

“That’s settled that,” Bishop rasped. “I’m going to break that door down.”

Gossen cried: “No!”

The sound of a fire-engine bell came clearly, as Roger said:

“Bish, I want to know this before the firemen come. How did you know that Ashley was here?”

“One of our chaps saw a man who answered his description, and reported. Turnbull was here, and was on it like a flash.”

The fire-fighting unit swung round a corner and pulled up, and the blue-clad men jumped off, already wearing steel helmets and carrying their axes.

Gossen called out in a frail but carrying voice:

“Mr Ashley, don’t cause any more trouble, sir, you’ll never get away. Give yourself up, Mr Ashley, it will be best in the long run.”

There was no response.

“Get the door down, will you?” Bishop said to the Fire Service Officer who came clumping over.

Axes were raised and smacked down into the oak of the doors, dexterous twists and turns freed each one, then it smacked home again. Every blow seemed to strike at Gossen’s frail body; with each, he winced.

“What’s that petrol and phosphorus doing in there?” Roger asked Gossen.

“Don’t ask *me*, Mr West. I’m not responsible for what my workmen do, am I? Why, I don’t even know for certain who’s in there! The shop shouldn’t have been opened at all until midday, I always prefer to open it myself, and I’m not at all well these days —”

The door sagged, and one of the firemen pushed it violently open. It fell with a crash, leaving a gaping hole. The firemen stepped to one side, and Roger moved forward with the Chief Fire Officer.

“Carry a spare helmet?” Roger asked.

“Yes. Charlie —” the officer snapped his fingers, a man brought a steel helmet. “Better let me lead the way, Mr West.”

Bishop joined them.

The inside of the shop was cavern-dark, but the fire officer used a powerful torch, and its beam crept round the empty walls, now and again striking a picture hanging on a hook, or one standing up against the wall. There were empty counters, or draped trestle tables. Unlighted electric lamps hung down, all with white, old-fashioned office shades. Everywhere was a smell of dust and a smell of varnish and paint.

"Put on a light," called Bishop.

There was a click.

"No electricity," the fire-fighting officer remarked uneasily.

"Ashley!" Roger shouted. "Don't make it more difficult for „ yourself. Give yourself up."

There was no answer.

"I don't like it," said Bishop. "They might have guns, or more of that petrol."

The beam of the torch moved, and fell on a closed door in a corner.

"Looks as if we'll have to get that down too," Roger said, and went near it, looking up at the low ceiling, to dodge aside if more liquid fire came.

"You'll never force that door, Gossen's made sure about that," Bishop declared sourly. "He sometimes stores pictures worth thousands."

"Show me a door, and I'll force it in a few minutes," boasted the Fire Officer.

"I'll go and have a look at the back, while you're doing it," Roger said to Bishop. "Coming?"

"You're as bad as Turnbull," Bishop growled, but led the way. It had nearly stopped raining, and there was a brighter look about the sky. The crowds were larger, and an ambulance was standing by.

Bishop took a narrow side-turning, then opened a wooden

gate. This led to gardens divided by brick walls which looked as if they might fall down under pressure. Some distance along, about the spot where he would expect the back yard of Gossen's shop, was a low, squat, square concrete building, ugly as it could be, and with only two small barred windows. Turnbull was working at one of the bars, and the sound of a saw screeching on metal was harsh and loud.

"What the hell does he want — a medal?" Bishop demanded.

Then Turnbull swung round, saw them, and beckoned furiously. Bishop would have ignored him; Roger broke into a run.

"What is it?" he demanded as he drew level.

"Smoke in there," Turnbull said, jerkily. "There must be a hell of a fire, I can't cut through these bars in time."

Roger smelt the unmistakable stench of burning petrol.

"Keep trying," he urged, and raced back to Portobello Road, to warn the men there. Gossen was peering in at the door of the shop, and Roger pushed him aside, with Bishop on his heels. As they reached the door, one fireman said:

"We're through, sir."

The Chief Officer put his shoulder to the door, and heaved it back. Thick smoke billowed out, surrounding them and making them choke.

Then Roger saw that Turnbull had managed to get inside.

13

Self-Destruction

TURNBULL WAS thrusting himself towards a corner where the fire was fierce and glowing red. The whole place was thick with grey smoke which had a peculiar, oily smell of petrol, paint and varnish burning, and in this, Turnbull loomed hugely. A man was lying head towards the door, only a few yards from the fire. Turnbull reached him, a second ahead of Roger. Gasping from the smoke, they bent down to pick the man up.

Then Roger was yanked aside, and the Chief Fire Officer said:

"We've got masks."

"Get him out, quick," Turnbull rasped.

"We'll get him out, you two keep out of the way."

It seemed an age, but it was only a few seconds before two firemen arrived with smoke masks. Roger and Turnbull staggered out choking and coughing one against the other, but Roger made himself stand and watch as the huddled figure was dragged out.

***

"I'll bet a pony that's Michael Ashley," Turnbull wheezed. Then he stopped, for another man, obviously a dead man, was carried out.

"Or that is," Roger said.

The sun was shining, and it was quite warm.

Gossen, looking like a ghoul, was drooping in a shop doorway, watching two men being thrust into an ambulance, and seeing the firemen, with their hoses snaking and writhing like giant worms, filling with water which smacked into the shop, and into the strong-room. The crowd was several hundred strong, and very noisy: cordons of police were at the barricades.

Roger and Turnbull stood watching the two stretchers.

The first man was Michael Ashley, with his hair burnt, and

ugly red patches on his forehead; his clothes were singed, but apparently his body hadn't been badly burnt. A sheet covered the head and face of the second man.

The ambulance moved off, with a Yard detective squatting next to Ashley, and an ambulance man with him.

Roger asked Bishop: "Where can we talk to Gossen?"

"In a hurry?"

"Yes."

"There's a back parlour to a shop along here, we can use that," Bishop said, and looked at Turnbull with acute dislike.

Roger said: "Turnbull, go and find out how soon Ashley can talk, and report in person to me at the Yard, will you?"

Turnbull was almost meek.

"Right." He turned away, and Roger gripped Gossen's arm.

"Come on, we want to talk to you."

"You ought to be in there, saving my pictures, saving everything!" Gossen choked. His eyes were staring and wild, his voice so hoarse that it seemed to hurt him.

Bishop led the way into a sweet shop, had a word with the old man at the counter, and then took Roger and Gossen into the little parlour at the back. There was a sofa, a coal lire smouldering, some cartons of sweets and chocolates in one corner. Roger let Gossen go, and said coldly:

"Don't forget this is a murder investigation, Gossen, and don't forget that your strong-room was destroyed by arson."

"What are you trying to tell me? That I burned my own place? You must be crazy!"

"Let's take it that I'm crazy," Roger said, still roughly. "When did Michael Ashley go there?"

"I don't know!"

"How many people have the keys to your shop?"

"Only — only me."

“How many have keys to the strong-room?”

“Any — anyone can make a set of keys, they only had to borrow them for five minutes and make impressions.” The defiance in the old man’s voice was less strident, and he did not meet Roger’s eyes.

“One set of keys, and you look after them. You’ll have a hell of a job proving that anyone made impressions, then. You knew we were looking for Ashley, every newspaper in the country has carried the story.”

“I told him myself,” Bishop put in. “Personally.”

“So you knew we were after him,” Roger repeated. “Why let him hide in there? Come on, out with it.” He had never sounded harsher, never looked more menacing. “You gave shelter to a man wanted on suspicion of murder. You’d better have a good reason.”

Sweat made Gossen’s leathery face look greasy. Bishop was standing by his side, ready to clap an arresting hand on his shoulder. The shopkeeper hovered in the doorway, until the shop bell clanged. Gossen’s lips began to quiver, but he insisted:

“I didn’t know he was there, I tell you. One of my runners told me he wanted to hide a pal, so I let him. I didn’t know who he was going to hide, didn’t have any idea.”

“Who was the runner?” Bishop demanded.

“It was Hill, the chap who was burned to death, that’s all I know!” cried Gossen.

“Did Hill work for anyone else?” demanded Roger. “Did he work for Jeremy Clinton?”

Gossen gasped: “No!” so quickly that Roger felt positive that he was lying.

***

“Get the truth out of him if you can,” Roger said to Bishop, “and see if your chaps can get a line on Clinton, will you?”

“You bet I will,” Bishop promised.

The sun was hot when Roger reached the street. At least a thousand people, half of them Jamaicans, were gazing and chattering. Women with babies in their arms or in prams, with toddlers at their skirts, men with small children on their shoulders. The police cordoned off the area about the shop, but not the ends of the street. Only one fire engine remained, and the hoses were being coiled up to that. The Chief Fire Officer was coming out of the broken doorway, trampling on the mass of blackened wreckage. A dozen or so scorched canvases were leaning against the outside wall, and inside there were several dozen more. The paint and varnish on them had blistered badly in the heat, although the actual canvas hadn't been burnt. Most of the gilt frames were scorched, but not beyond repair. "That all you got out?" Roger asked. "The rest is just a sticky mess," said the Fire Officer. "We'll have a good look round when we've got some light on, but I don't think you'll salvage much. There was a lot of paint and varnish stored in a corner, and a dozen medicine bottles filled with petrol and a spot of nitro in the corks, I'd say. Midget fire bombs. There are plenty of traces of an explosion and nitro-glycerine residue, looks to me as if a bomb was set to go off at a certain time. Not much doubt that Hill tried to reach the door, he didn't set fire to the varnish and spirits. Ashley could have, but — anyway, I'm glad you got him alive." Roger let him run on for a minute, then broke in, shook hands and hurried along to his car.

***

"The dead man was first suffocated by smoke, which was the cause of death, the burns were caused partly before and partly after death," said the pathologist's report at the yard. "Identification is by means of the jaw and teeth. He was Arthur Hill, aged forty-nine, of no fixed address.

"The other man, with head and hand burns, was not seriously injured on other parts of the body and recovered consciousness

within an hour of being brought to the hospital. His right hand was only slightly burnt. His name is Michael Ashley, of New Bond Street, London, Wi, and Dolchester Mansions, W1."

***

"Ashley says he decided to hide because he thought we'd charge him, and he wanted a chance to find out who really killed Maggie Roy," Turnbull reported. "He said he paid Hill twenty quid to let him hide there."

"Think he's telling the truth?" Roger asked.

"Like hell I do. I'd like to hand him over to your New York pals for some third degree. They'd make him talk, I'll say that for them. They'd make Gossen talk, too, and that's more than Bishop will."

Roger said: "You've got a lot of wrong ideas about New York and other things."

"Who says so?"

"I'm saying so," Roger answered, patiently. "Turnbull, I know something's eating you and I think I know what it is, but if you're not careful, it will break you. You're relying too much on your own judgement. If it lets you down —"

"Listen to who's talking," jeered Turnbull. "While you were a CI you broke every rule in the book. Did you ever wait for a superintendent's approval before acting? Not on your nelly! Now it's do as you say, not as you did. I never did like being preached at, and while we're on the subject —"

"Shut up!" Roger, his patience snapped, raised his voice almost to a shout. "I'm your superior officer and I'm giving you orders, if that's the only way you'll play it. Don't do anything else on this case without first consulting me. Got that?"

Turnbull looked furious enough to strike him. It was ludicrous for two senior officers to be viciously hostile, but the crisis was on them. If Turnbull lost his self-control completely, he would have to

be taken off the case.

Turnbull said icily, “Yes, sir,” and turned on his heel.

***

This had happened between them once before, when Turnbull had gone too far; then Roger had saved him from disaster. Now unhappiness over his wife warped his judgement again, and it was going to make a lot of difficulties.

Roger had a gloomy feeling that he could have handled the situation better, and was scowling at his desk when Turnbull appeared, with the report on the pictures salvaged from Gossen’s place. He dropped it in front of Roger.

“Old canvases cleaned off, and some had the background of period work painted in,” Roger observed, as if there had been no trouble. “Two canvases in course of preparation, after Constable and Gainsborough. See what that means?”

“It squares with a note from Fletcher about those paintings at the Gallery waiting for Rapelli,” Turnbull answered. This seemed a great effort to restore good relations. “They’re recent paintings done on old canvas with paint faked to seem old. Sticks out a mile that the Old World Gallery’s been sending faked paintings to New York and getting big prices for them. There’d be a small value on them in England, so they wouldn’t be subject to control. There’d be no trouble getting them out either — the problem would be getting them into the United States, and then boosting their value. Old Rapelli was half blind and easy to fool.”

“How about his daughter?” Roger demanded.

“Could have been fooled because she knows damn-all, or could be a party to the racket,” Turnbull answered. “Clint was married to her, and he’s got a record of fraud. Say! How about *that* for the motive we’ve been looking for?” Turn- bull clapped his hands with a noise like a bullet-shot. “Margaret Roy discovered that Telisa and her ex, with Ashley and maybe Wickham, were in this

racket, and was going to blab, so she was killed. She'd told Rapelli by telephone before she died, so he had to go. Then Clint tried to kill anyone who could name him and Telisa, including Ashley. When the hell are we going to get Clint?"

"Before he reaches New York, I hope," Roger said fervently.

"Warned New York yet?"

"Hardy is going to talk to Tollifer, and ask them to take a closer look at some of the pictures which Rapelli's been buying from London and selling over there. Our job is to find out how many fakes have been handled by old Gossen, and sent out of England."

"When will Ashley be able to talk?"

"Any time. But I'm going to tackle Wickham first."

"You wouldn't like to let me loose on Wickham, would you?" Turnbull asked almost pleadingly. He was certainly making a supreme effort to co-operate. "I could probably scare the living daylights out of him."

"You go and see Wickham," Roger agreed.

"Right! And there's one other thing we've got to fit in."

"What's that?"

"The attack on Vanity Roy at Chelsea."

"And the picture slashing job there," Roger agreed. "What about it?"

"Don't act the idiot boy," said Turnbull. "If Vanity Roy knows about any faked paintings, she might be in the racket, and have been attacked simply to fool us."

"Possible, I suppose," conceded Roger. "With Wickham you'd better take the attitude that all of them must have known there was something phoney in those paintings."

"You going to have a go at Ashley?"

"Yes."

"Then give me Vanity," Turnbull said, grinning his fiercest grin.

As he turned to go, the door opened and a messenger came in with a Western Union cable and a decoding. Roger almost snatched it, and Turnbull read over his shoulder.

New York said: “Recommend you search Old Gallery records for exact quantity of old paintings consigned to Rapelli.”

“They’re on the ball,” Turnbull observed almost regretfully. “See that time? They sent that off before we sent ours to them. That puts them in front, but I’m damned if I’m going to let them stay there. Anything in from Bishop about Gossen or Clint — Clinton?” he added abruptly.

“No,” Roger said.

“That man’s as slow as a country copper,” Turnbull growled.

A telephone on Roger’s desk rang, saving him the need for comment. He picked it up, and the operator said:

“It’s Superintendent Bishop, sir.”

“Put him through. It’s your country copper,” Roger added in an aside to Turnbull.

Then Bishop came on the line; a gruff-voiced Bishop.

“I’ve found out that Clint’s been in and out of Gossen’s place a lot,” he reported. “He was working with Gossen, there’s no doubt about that, and faked pictures would be right up Clint’s street. There’s a man we want.”

“Gossen would do for a start,” Roger said. “Will you bring him here or shall I send for him?”

“That’s the bit you’re not going to like,” Bishop said. “He’s vanished.”

***

“There’s just one place we haven’t tried,” Roger said, when he had absorbed the shock of that. “It’s a firm of fine art carriers and shippers, named Meyer — M. Meyer, with an SE1, address. Tell the Division to check the warehouse quick.”

Turnbull plucked up a telephone. “Any special angle?” he

demanded.

"A Meyer's van delivered some paintings from Gossen's to the gallery," Roger told him. "It's possible —" But Turnbull was already speaking to the Division.

14

Gossen

"THIS IS Meyer's Warehouse," a girl said, crisply.

"I've got to see Mr Clint urgently," Gossen said, into the telephone at a kiosk near Piccadilly. "Tell him it's urgent — it's vital."

"I'll tell him when he comes in," the girl answered. "Who's that speaking?"

"I've told you! I'm Gossen, he'll know." He rang off.

He was trembling, and there was a beading of sweat on his leathery forehead. He looked very old. The handkerchief with which he wiped his forehead was dirty and damp. He didn't step out of the box at once, but fumbled for more coppers, dropped them into the slot, and then dialled a May- fair number. The ringing sound went on and on, and he was about to give up when there was a break in it.

"This is Vanity Roy," a woman answered.

"Is Mr James Wickham there?" Now Gossen's voice held a humble note.

"I'm afraid he's not, but he said he would look in during the evening. Can I give him a message?"

"Yes, Miss, please," Gossen said. "Please tell him to look out for Clint. He'll know what I mean."

"Who is it speaking?" The girl was very brisk.

"He'll know," Gossen said.

He rang off, again, and scrubbed his forehead with that grey-looking handkerchief. A young couple came up, holding hands, and stood just outside the kiosk. Gossen put his hand to his pocket, took out some coppers and stared down at their darkness against his hand. He needed another twopence before he could make a third call. He left the box. The two policemen looked at him, but took no

notice. He turned his back on them, banged into a middle-aged woman with a dowager's air and a big bust, and apologized meekly. The pavement was crowded, the sun was going behind clouds, and the wind which had dropped for a while was freshening again.

The old man went to a newspaper-seller, and type met type. Gossen might be worth a fortune but he looked as if he hadn't two pennies to rub together. He bought an *Evening News* and put the change into his pocket, then glanced quickly at the front page. There were photographs of the shop and the crowds and of the fire engines. West was there. The newspaper had the story right, and reported that Hill was dead, and that the police were waiting at Michael Ashley's bedside. Gossen shivered. He walked on briskly, yet dragged his right foot a little, and soon he came to more telephone boxes. He slipped into one, but before he put his money in the slot, he looked round as if to make sure that he hadn't been followed.

No one took any notice of him.

He dialled a Chelsea number, and was answered promptly by a hoarse-voiced man.

"That you, Jerry?"

"Of course it's me," the man said, with sudden tension. "How about it, Gossen? Okay for me to go?"

"Jerry, I don't know how they got on to it, but the police asked if I knew you."

"If you've talked —" There was viciousness in the other man's voice.

"But I haven't," Gossen interrupted hoarsely. "I said I'd never heard of you, but once they start, they keep at you. You can't get out too quick, Jerry, but you mustn't use the name Clint or Clinton."

"I didn't intend to," Jeremy Clint said roughly. "Gossen, if you shopped me, I'll —"

“But I didn’t!” insisted the old man. “Don’t I know what would happen if I did?” He was sweating. “I even ducked the cops to get a message to you, they’ll pick me up any time now. I won’t let you down, Jerry, but get out, quick.”

“I’ll get out,” Clint said. “And you keep away from the cops for another twenty-four hours. Don’t make any mistake. If the cops get me, I’ll still get you.”

Gossen gave up, and rang off.

It was sticky hot in the kiosk when he pushed the heavy door, and stepped outside. He was near a traffic block, and an empty taxi was almost opposite. He beckoned it, got in, and as the cab started off at the green light, he said in a frail voice:

4Just drive round the parks for half an hour, and then drop me at Waterloo Station, Waterloo Road entrance.”

“Yes, sir.”

The old man sat huddled in his corner, hardly looking at the parks, the crowds beginning to throng them, the hundreds stretched out on the damp grass or sitting in deck chairs, the children playing. Every time he saw a policeman he seemed to shrink further back in his corner, and he was not seen. Exactly half an hour after he had stepped into the taxi, he got out in Waterloo Road, and then walked at that brisk pace, but with his right leg dipping a little, towards the Old Vic. He turned down by this. Beyond were streets of little grey houses, making the houses of the Portobello Road area look palatial. The streets were mostly empty. Now and again he passed a small dilapidated car, once a sleek modern Ford Zephyr, more often motor cycles and motor scooters. He kept looking behind him, but was not followed.

He slipped into an alley between terraces of houses, where a notice-board said: *M. Meyer, Shippers.* The sign was startlingly new and bright and the cargo boat drawn on it was as much a work of art as any country inn sign.

At the back of these terraces was a huge shed, also marked *M. Meyer,* with a small door let into a big door which was wider than the average pantechnicon by little more than three inches on either side.

The smaller door was closed. Gossen took out a key, took a final swift glance over his shoulder, inserted the key and turned, then thrust the door open. It was pitch dark inside, and the bright daylight seemed like the beam of a searchlight.

He stepped in and pushed the door behind him; and then he heard a sound. He turned wearily towards it. There was just enough light to show him the figure of a man.

Suddenly great fear swept over Gossen, and he raised his frail arms and cried:

"Jerry! Don't—"

He tried desperately to open the door wide and get away, but was too slow and too frail.

The first blow cut off his scream.

***

"Gossen was seen near the Old Vic," Turnbull told Roger. "That's not far from Meyer's place. Wouldn't like me to go and see for myself, would you?"

"There's too much to do here," Roger said, as a telephone bell rang. He lifted the receiver almost automatically. "West here."

This time the operator had put the caller through, and a man with a familiar voice said:

"Hallo, Handsome. That true you want old Gossen alive?"

"I do!"

"Well, you can't have him."

The laconic comment didn't sink in at first.

"Don't give me —" Roger began, and then broke off. "What's this?" His voice was harder.

"When that flash came in from Turnbull, I sent a couple of my

chaps round to see if he was at Meyer's Warehouse," the caller told him. "He was. Head smashed in. Coming over to have a look for yourself?"

"Hold everything," Roger said. "Come on, Turnbull!"

He hoped that gesture would help to heal the breach between them, and Turnbull seemed to respond almost eagerly.

"No need for two of us," he said. "I'll see Wickham again, I can't help feeling he's our man."

"Carry on," Roger said.

There was a lot of fast, home-going traffic, but he made the trip across the river and past the Old Vic in ten minutes and pulled up near Meyer's Warehouse. Few people were about: the local police had managed to keep this quiet so far.

The ambulance hadn't arrived yet; it would draw the crowds when it came. Roger went into a big, lofty, very clean warehouse; there was a main shed, with several smaller storage rooms. The shed was empty, and its concrete floor quite clean. The rooms were crammed with old pictures and frames, and it looked like a mass of junk.

In one of the rooms was a large bench with old canvases on it, and obviously someone had been in the process of taking the paint and varnish off, so that the canvas could be used again. "Who's this Meyer?" Roger asked the local superintendent. "He's the oldish man who owns the place, but he says he leaves everything to his manager, a chap named Ordin," a tall, lanky superintendent replied. "I've sent for him. But there are some things we can see for ourselves, Handsome." He led the way to the smallest of the rooms. "Here's where pictures were crated and got ready for shipping, and here are printed labels to Rapelli's, Madison Avenue, New York, and the New Bond Street gallery's name on each label, too."

"Find that manager," said Roger, "and find out who knew that Gossen often came here. Call in every man you've got, and I'll send

as many as I can over from the Yard." The words came thick, fast, angry. "We want every man, woman and child questioned, every house called on, every tradesman tackled. We'll flash a request for information on the television and radio tonight."

"I'll get it started," the local man promised. "What's got under your skin, Handsome?"

"Margaret Roy, old Rapelli, Hill and now Gossen. When's it going to stop? We've got to make sure this killer can't get to New York, so we've got to have him quick."

"You won't find it easy to make the people round here talk," the local man reminded him, "but I'll do all I can."

Roger said: "Fred, don't let him slip through." He drove off, feeling vicious with himself, bitter with a sense of disastrous failure. Gossen should have been watched more closely, and it was no consolation to say that he must have slipped Bishop's man deliberately.

Roger reached the Yard a little after seven, strode up to the office, and thrust the door open. Turnbull was sitting in his chair again.

"My God, what's eating you?" he demanded.

"Forgotten about Gossen?"

"He's no loss."

"He was our main lead to the killer," Roger said. "What did you get from Wickham?"

"He was at the Old World Gallery from five o'clock until half-past six."

"Gossen was killed six-ish, so that's given Wickham a perfect alibi," Roger said, gloomily. "He wasn't at Gossen's place in Portobello Road last night either, so he didn't kill Hill or set that place on fire. Ashley's in the clear about Gossen, too. So we know we've a killer whose name is unknown to us, unless it's this Clint or Clinton."

Turnbull said: “I’ll work all night if needs be on Telisa’s ex. Anything special for me?”

“Check the watch on Vanity Roy and James Wickham. Step up the search for Clint. Take a Fingerprints man over to the warehouse with photograph’s of Clint’s dabs, and see if he’s ever been there. Have the assistants at the gallery Followed — they knew about the warehouse too. Follow every lead, every half a lead, and when you’ve made sure everything’s ticking over, go and see how they’re getting on at Meyer’s Warehouse. If anyone was seen going in or out of that warehouse, we want him. Man or woman.”

“Right,” Turnbull said. “What are you going to do?”

“I’m going to see Vanity Roy and Wickham,” Roger said.

***

Wickham was suave.

“I don’t believe my cousin is guilty of any crime, Superintendent,” he said. “This business of faked pictures is news to me, and it will be news to him. It might have been someone at the warehouse, or at Gossen’s place. I never did trust Gossen. . . .”

“Did your cousin?”

“He used Gossen because Gossen was a genius at retouching and restoring, and because he employed other men who were nearly as good,” Wickham answered. “He didn’t hold a man’s past against him, and wouldn’t have cared if the workman had spent half his life in jail. It’s obvious that some of the runners or some of the other restorers who worked for Gossen have been mixed up in this, and if they do a good job, even the so-called experts can hardly tell the difference between a hundred-year-old painting and a new one done on old canvas.”

“Can you?”

“Not always.”

“Can you make new paintings look old?”

“If I didn’t know you were working under considerable

pressure, I would resent that question," Wickham said coldly. "No, I can't. I am a modern painter, and I'm not interested in faking or copying."

"Can you give me a complete list of people your cousin dealt with on restoring and cleaning?"

"All the work was put through Gossen," Wickham answered. "He's the man you want."

"For what?"

Wickham answered suavely: "I'm not a complete fool, West. It's now obvious that some faked paintings have been sent to New York. My cousin would certainly not engage in that kind of fraud, but obviously Gossen did. As obviously my poor cousin Margaret found out, and was killed. Mr Ashley doubtless discovered it — ahead of the police, apparently." That sneer misfired. "It's clear that Rapelli found out, too. My cousin probably went to warn him, but found he'd been murdered. You want to look for Gossen's associates each side of the Atlantic, and waste less time with us."

"Did Jeremy Clinton, Telisa Rapelli's ex-husband, work for Gossen?" Roger demanded.

"I wouldn't know him if I saw him," Wickham answered.

***

Vanity Roy was in her flat, alone. She was wearing a sheath-like dress, which emphasized her slimness and her small- ness. Her hair looked as if it had been burnished, and her eyes carried the fear which had been there from the moment Roger had first seen her.

"I was hoping you would come," she said, unexpectedly. "Earlier today a man rang up and told me to warn Mr Wickham about this Clint. I told my cousin and he —" she broke off again, as if hating what amounted to a kind of betrayal. "He was obviously worried, although he told me he hadn't any idea what the message meant. You won't tell him that I told you, will you?"

For the first time Roger began to feel that Vanity Roy was absolutely on the level.

"I certainly won't," he promised. "What did the man sound like?"

"I should say he was old," Vanity answered.

Gossen?

"You're positive that it worried your cousin?"

"I'm quite sure," Vanity stood up and drew closer to him. Obviously she was in great distress, but her voice was quite steady, her eyes were calm. "I can't live in this uncertainty any longer. Is there anything I can do, Mr West? Whatever the risk, I must do something."

"If there is a thing you can do, I'll tell you at once," Roger said. "Don't do anything, don't talk about Clint again, don't even show your suspicions. It could be very dangerous indeed."

"I know," Vanity said. "That's what frightens me so."

***

"Watch that girl and watch Wickham so that we know every move they make," Roger ordered. "Be sure that Wickham knows how closely he's watched, and give the girl absolute priority. If we lose her —"

"We won't lose her," Turnbull said. "I'll stay on the job day and night. But we've had a break."

Roger went taut.

"What?"

"The Meyer's Warehouse manager was really Jeremy Clinton or Clint. Fingerprints prove it," Turnbull reported. "He was seen at the warehouse last night, that's the last we know, so far. Every port and air-terminal's being circulated with a description and a photograph, but you'd better tell your pal Goodison to watch out, too. Maybe Clint's going back to his ex-wife, Telisa."

"I'll contact Goodison soon," Roger said. "Now I'm going to

see if I can make Ashley talk."

He did not see the look, almost of malevolence, which Turnbull gave him as he went out. Sight of it would have destroyed any illusion that Turnbull was becoming amiable.

***

Ashley had a bandage on his head, and a patch or two on his hands. His hooked nose had not been damaged; his eyebrows were singed a little, that was all. His eyes were bloodshot, but cither a sedative or an iron nerve kept his hands and his voice quite steady.

Roger sat by the side of his bed, in a small, square, bare hospital ward.

"There's nothing more I can tell you," Ashley said flatly. "I didn't fancy being cooped up in a cell under remand and I felt sure you were going to arrest me."

"Any solicitor would have told you that we hadn't grounds," Roger said. "And you knew we were bound to get on to Gossen, so the last place you'd go to hide was at his place. What made you go there?"

Ashley said: "You seem to know all the answers. Why ask me?"

"If you don't stop playing the fool, you, Wickham and Vanity Roy might be killed." Roger said roughly. "Let's have the truth. Why did you go to Gossen's?" When Ashley sat silent, he added roughly: "Did Clint make you go?"

Ashley gasped: "Good God! What do you know about Clint?"

"That he's probably behind this, but doesn't work alone, and that he might hate his ex-wife because she divorced him — because of you. Isn't that the truth?"

Ashley looked dumbfounded, and it was a long time before he answered, weakly, as if he couldn't hold out a moment longer.

"All right, I give in, West. Yes — Clint hates the lot of us. I think he killed Margaret, but I don't know why. He threatened to

kill Vanity if I didn't go to see him at Gossen's place. I knew that I might be walking into a trap, but I had to go. There isn't a thing I wouldn't do for Vanity. That's the absolute truth."

4If you'd told us this before she'd be a damned sight safer," Roger said, as if he accepted the story. 4What else do you know about Clint? Did you know he managed Meyer's Warehouse?"

"Yes, I did," Ashley answered. "I always felt a bit conscience-stricken about him and Telisa, and so I got him the fob. I wish to God I hadn't! Some weeks ago we began to suspect that fakes were being shipped in our name, and began to look for the swindler. Clint was an obvious possibility — he was once in prison for fraud, that's why he changed his name."

This had a ring of truth, but a guilty man often mixed truth with lies.

Roger nodded, and switched questions without warning.

"Why did you fly to New York under an assumed name and false passport?"

"I knew by then that Clint had been sending fakes to New York, and thought he'd killed Margaret," Ashley answered quietly, and without hesitation. "But if the galleries were known to be handling fakes, we would all be ruined. I had to check with the Rapellis, too. I couldn't understand why they didn't complain about fakes. When I got to New York, Rapelli had been murdered." Ashley raised his hands helplessly. "I know that the New York police think I killed him, but I didn't. Clint must have had a contact over there, and arranged the murder to prevent Rapelli from talking."

"Did you find out why he hadn't talked before?"

"I can guess," Ashley said. "He's been going blind for years — Telisa was his eyes. I don't think he knew about the fakes."

Then why should Clint kill him?"

"Damn it, I'm only guessing," Ashley protested. "Margaret almost certainly discovered what was happening. She telephoned

New York from the gallery the night before she died — I know that because I had a query from the telephone exchange about it, next morning. She must have talked to Rapelli, as Telisa was in Los Angeles. If you ask me, Clint killed Margaret, arranged Rapelli's killing —"

"By remote control?"

"Clint was in New York a week ago," Ashley answered. "He could have laid it on then. He's a cold-blooded devil — he always was. I think he hated us all, he's not only bad but a psychopath."

"And you still tried to tackle him yourself," Roger said sharply.

"I had to try, for Vanity's sake," Ashley answered simply. "And — and for the good name of the gallery." He looked very tired now, and his eyes were glassy: "As for the two names — I've used them for years. I started when I used to go to and from New York regularly, and I've often used the trick on the Continent," he explained. "Ours is a tricky business, West. I often need to get ahead of a competitor and see a private customer or get a pre-view of a sale. I've only committed a technical offence with the false passport though. I guessed you'd alert Idlewild for me, and wanted desperately to see Rapelli, so I used the switch." Ashley closed his eyes. "It fooled the New York police all right. I wish to God it hadn't."

***

He sounded as if he meant that.

***

It was half an hour's journey to the Chelsea studio, where James Wickham was still on his own. It took Roger ten minutes to break down Wickham's resistance, but at last he confirmed everything that his cousin had said.

"My one concern was to save Vanity, and try to help the Rapellis," he said stiffly. "My conscience is quite clear."

***

Ashley and Wickham might think Clint the killer; they certainly couldn't prove it.

***

"I'll tell you one thing," Turnbull said, at the Yard. "Clint may be the man we want on this side, but someone in New York knew they were handling fakes. If the old man knew he might have kept quiet for the daughter's sake, but the daughter will know Clint's New York contact. Maybe she's it. Clint's on his way there, and he might be going to make sure she can't talk."

"Probably," Roger agreed. "I'll warn them that he might be on the way."

"You could also tell them to hold him, we don't want another one to slip through their fingers," Turnbull sneered.

Part IV

NEW YORK — SECOND PHASE

15

Anger

GOODISON STOOD, tall and massive, with his left arm in a sling and held across his chest. In front of him, only a little shorter, was Telisa Rapelli. Photographs didn't do her justice because they robbed her of her colouring. He had seen her three times before, yet each time the brightness of her blue eyes, the red of her lips, the shimmering bronze of her hair, took him by surprise.

The first time he had seen her, she had been shocked and numbed by the news of her father's death.

The second time, she had seemed passionately anxious to help the police to find the murderer.

Now, there was just one word for what she was showing: anger. And it was probably faked, Goodison thought. He ought to be angry, but was deliberately cool, hoping to make her ensnare herself. For reports made it certain that Pillitzer was in the Rapelli warehouse in Long Island City, and she might know that. Goodison was being very cautious. He had asked her if she had seen Clint, and she had answered 'no'. He had implied that she and her father had sold fakes to art- collectors. From then on her anger had flared up, and she was quite something to see.

Jensen was near the door. A Precinct man was outside in the main gallery of the shop itself. This was the office, and it was nearly half-past five in the evening; the main door would soon be shut. The assistants were out there, waiting for zero hour.

"I'm sorry to put you to so much extra trouble, ma'am," Goodison said, deliberately meek, "but we just have to inspect all the paintings without delay."

"I see no point in it at all."

"We know that faked paintings were shipped from England," Goodison explained patiently, "and we want to examine every one

you received here, to find out if they're faked or genuine. In the past year your gallery has sold nearly a hundred and fifty paintings, and only eighty-one are on the records as bought from England. I want to know where the others came from. If they were fakes —"

"It is an insult to my father's name."

"If everything is right with the pictures, it's no insult to anybody. If anything is wrong, someone else might have known about it, not necessarily Mr Rapelli."

"It would be impossible to fake a picture which would deceive him," Telisa asserted, "and he examined every one which came into the gallery."

So she did not realize that the police knew her father had been losing his sight.

"Supposing you hand over the keys to the store-rooms here and on Long Island?" Goodison felt safe to sound impatient. The warehouse was being watched from a distance, and Pillitzer could not get away. The vital thing was to find out if Telisa knew where he was. "Just hand the keys over, and get ready to come with us. Experts will be here in a matter of minutes."

"It will be a waste of time."

"Ma'am," Goodison said, now coldly, "I've received information from London that your ex-husband is a killer and on his way over here. And we know that Pillitzer is loose, also. We don't want any more dead bodies in the morgue, we don't have room. In particular we don't want to see your ex-husband stretched out cold. We want to talk to him."

Telisa actually swayed on her feet, as if with shock.

"What's the truth of this?" demanded Goodison. "You still love the guy? It looks as if he was involved in your father's murder. That make you feel good?"

He thought she might collapse, but she recovered, and when she looked at him again her eyes had a strange brilliance.

“Yes,” she said. “I love him.”

“You divorced him.”

“I don’t have to betray him.”

“Even though he murdered your own father?”

“I don’t believe he did.”

“Where is he?” Goodison barked.

“I don’t know.”

“He in New York?”

“I tell you I don’t know.”

“It’s your conscience,” Goodison said, still coldly. “Now, we’ll see what pictures are here, and then we’ll go over to Long Island and examine the stock you’ve got there.”

She turned away, opened the door of a safe, and took out a bunch of keys. With ostentatious care, she closed and locked the safe. As she did so, two men came along the gallery, one walking heavily, one lightly. Goodison called them in. One was a short, plump, middle-aged man, shiny, with a spotted black and white bow tie, a plain charcoal black suit. This was Redman, a well-known dealer and art-expert. The other was Sergeant Mayne, tall and big, of the Forgery Squad; he specialised in works of art. Goodison saw the embarrassment on Redman’s round face, and wasn’t surprised when he went across to Telisa and said:

“I wouldn’t do this, Telisa, if I wasn’t sure it would clear your father’s good name.” i “You should say that to the police,” Telisa said.

“Let’s go,” Goodison said sharply.

Some of the pictures were in the cellar here, a dozen had come from London recently. Redman and the Forgery Squad man studied them through magnifying glasses, made tests with acids on the paint in corners, examined the canvases, shone bright lights against it, and spent so much time over each picture that even Jensen began to fidget.

Redman finished, and said quietly: “I am positive that each of these paintings is genuine. Each has the artist’s name and the picture history, and the evidence appears to be quite conclusive.”

“You agree?” Goodison asked the HQ man.

“Yeah.”

Telisa’s eyes momentarily showed her satisfaction, but she was still aloof and angry as they went to the car. Without appearing to, Goodison watched her closely. She sat upright, staring straight ahead. She wore black, without relief, but her own colouring was so vivid that the black faded into the background.

They went over Queensborough Bridge. At first the downtown skyline looked like a miracle, with the evening sun shining on it out of a purply red sky. The tyres hummed over the metal surface. Peak hour was past, but there was still heavy traffic, and the higher level was one way only out of Manhattan. They turned off at the first exit, on the right, and seemed to look over the roofs of an old, dwarf city, which had been disowned by the new giant behind it.

They turned left, towards the warehouse district, passed under the bridge, and then turned into a street near the subway. One freshly painted building set among a dozen others of the same size and height was marked: ‘*Rapelli Galleries’* in gilt lettering. The double doors were closed.

“Is there a night watchman?” Goodison asked.

“Yes. The insurance company isn’t satisfied with the strongroom and alarm system by themselves.”

Goodison shrugged. They stopped, and Telisa got out without accepting Jensen’s or Redman’s proffered hand. She took out her keys and went straight to the door and opened it. She was about to step inside when Goodison said: Til lead the way.”

She didn’t speak as he took the keys; and his gun.

It was greyly dark inside, but barred windows let in sufficient light to save it from pitch darkness. There was a smell of polish, as

if a house had been freshly cleaned. The light switches were at hand, and Goodison pressed six down, click- click-click, one after the other. Light filled the big storeroom, with the furniture, all old and mostly valuable, stacked in rows as in a furniture depository. On the left were crates, obviously not yet opened, some with labels from Paris, Rome, Milan, Berlin, Copenhagen, most of the European capitals. There were also crates from Japan and the Far East, even one marked Moscow.

"The paintings are all kept in the strong-room, which is specially air-conditioned for them," Telisa said, and led the way to a door in a corner. Redman and Sergeant Mayne followed. Keys jangled. Goodison thought he heard a sound in an opposite corner and glanced swiftly towards it. Nothing moved in the brightness. Telisa opened the door of the picture room.

"I'll still go first," Goodison said.

He stepped forward; ready to shoot.

He saw a man move swiftly from one side, and on the instant recognised Pillitzer. He saw the glint of the knife in Pillitzer's hand; just a flash. His finger was on the trigger. He fired as Pillitzer stabbed at him, and darted past him. He heard Pillitzer gasp as the bullet hit him. The others scattered. Goodison swung round, to shoot, but Redman was staggering in the way, while Pillitzer was close to the door.

"Drop on your faces!" Goodison roared, and as Pillitzer opened the door, he fired again. He hit the man, he couldn't miss, but that didn't stop Pillitzer from opening the door, then turning round, showing sharp against the dazzling brightness of the day. A pink car flashed by as Goodison fired again. Now Pillitzer was angled in the doorway, and his arm was moving, like a man throwing a leisurely ball to base.

Sergeant Mayne fired.

Pillitzer seemed to fall back, top heavy, but his hand was at

the door. He found strength to stay upright. Something small, dark and round curled through the air. Goodison made a desperate leap forward, as two things happened. Pillitzer slammed and closed the door, and there was more greyness; and the thing he had thrown hit the floor, smashed, and then exploded into flame which seemed to burn the eyes.

Goodison was nearest.

He flung up his arms to save himself from the worst of the blast, and fell headlong. He didn't strike his head, but jarred his wounded arm, until he could have screeched with pain. Yellow-red flame was close to him, and heat, like the searing white heat of a furnace. He heard screaming. He felt himself dragged by the feet along on his chest, and the pain at his arm was excruciating. The heat lessened. He tried to get to his feet but couldn't. He saw two men pass through a hoop of flames and knew they were going to the door. He didn't see Telisa Rapelli, but heard her screaming. It wasn't just a scream of fear or pain, there were words:

"This way!" she screamed. *"This way!"* She was standing in the doorway of the picture room, and no man was ever likely to see such a sight again. The glow of the fire was upon her, and seemed to come from her eyes and from her hair and from her open mouth. Her hands were crooked and her arms raised as she beseeched the men to come and not to batter themselves against the outer door.

Goodison dragged himself to his knees.

The fire was fiercer now. He could feel it vicious against his skin, and sparks flew, red-hot, and fell on his clothes, so that he could smell the burning. He narrowed his eyes and felt tears biting at them. Then Telisa stood by him, dragging at his arm, helping him to his feet. He swayed. The heat was not ordinary heat; he looked upon hell.

"This way!" She didn't screech now, the words seemed to be forced from her. They staggered to the inner room, where the fire

was gaining a hold, across it, past rows and rows of hanging pictures and rows and rows of crated ones. Then they reached another door, and Telisa opened it, and they staggered into the cool of a narrow passage, to a flight of steps, and then through a doorway to a cellar-like room. Here, Telisa left him, fumbled with the door, and opened it.

Beyond was daylight, coolness, safety.

Behind was destruction, and behind was death.

***

"Did you get anyone out?" Goodison asked the fire chief.

"You kidding?"

"No one at all?" Goodison insisted.

"Brother, that was like being cremated."

Goodison stared at the burning building.

The sky was filled with black specks and black smoke. The air was filled with smoke and noise, the roaring of engines, the shouting of commands. The road was blocked; great fire tenders stretched across it. Eight fire-fighting crews were pouring water upon the buildings next to *Rapelli's*; There was no hope at all for Rapelli's itself.

There was a scream of sound, and the fire-light danced on scared eyes of a thousand people who gaped.

The roof began to crumble, fell in, and crashed.

"Oooooh!" the crowd gasped, and sagged away.

There were policemen, moving the people along slowly. There was Telisa Rapelli, next to Goodison; he owed her his life. She had tried to save the others, too — Redman and Sergeant Mayne, good men, alive one minute, dead in that ravenous fire the next.

His arm throbbed and beat, and seemed to snarl at him.

He saw a Precinct man, a lieutenant who had worked with him often, and he called:

"Jeb, spare a minute."

The other turned, recognised him, and gaped.

"You mixed up in *that*?" He elbowed his way through the crowd.

"You been here long?" Goodison asked.

"Since it started. There was a call from Headquarters to have the Rapelli warehouse watched. I came along. How was I to know that I would be too late?"

"There was a guy coming out."

"Sure, a little guy," Jeb said.

"Where is he?"

"In the ambulance, on the way to hospital, but I imagine he'll be dead when he arrives. He was shot all to pieces."

"Yeah," Goodison said.

He was going to faint. He must not, but he knew no way of avoiding it. He felt as he imagined Telisa Rapelli would be feeling. He was holding her — or she was holding him upright. Which was it? He was going to faint. He, big, husky New York cop who'd done everything, was going to faint in front of all these people, was going to let the woman go, was so dizzy he didn't know what he was doing.

"Jeb," he said, "take hold —"

"You all right?"

Telisa Rapelli said: "He's hurt, can't you see?"

"Don't let her go," Goodison insisted. "Hear me? Don't let her go."

"No one is going to let me go," Telisa said, as she might speak to a child. "I'm going to stay here. After this I don't want to go anywhere without protection."

"Jeb —"

He needn't have worried about Jeb, or anything. Jeb had brought more police along, and cleared a path. There was talk of an ambulance, but he would not hear of it. Policemen helped him into

a car, then helped Telisa into it, next to him.

"I just want cleaning up," he said. "I daren't face my wife like this. Just cleaning up."

"He wants cleaning up," Telisa echoed, as if she was mocking him.

"Take a shot of this," Jeb said, and handed Goodison a flask. It was just what he needed, but when he'd had it, his head began to lift off his shoulders, and he wished he had never heard of rye. But that settled as the car made its way first through the crowds, then along empty roads, then to the lower level where there was a line of traffic, going fast. The skyline seemed to jump up and down. The Empire State Building was splitting the sky in two.

"It was a parallel case," he said, and didn't feel stupid, although he probably sounded like it. "Parallel."

"What's that?" Telisa asked.

"Forget it." He looked at her. "You pulled yourself out of hysterics by your own tail," he said.

"I was safe," she said, simply, "and I wasn't frightened any more." She shuddered. "Why didn't the others listen to me? We could all have been saved."

"Miss Rapelli," Goodison said, "I want to thank you for saving my life." This time he felt foolish, but hoped he didn't sound like it. "That's one thing I won't forget."

"If only the others had listened," she said, as if despairing.

"Forget it. That night watchman — who hired him?"

"The warehouse manager."

"Not you?"

I'd never seen him before."

"Not your father?"

Anger flashed, as it always did when there was any reflection on her father's name.

"I've told you, the warehouse manager hired him."

"He hired Pillitzer."

She seemed to slump back in her corner.

"That's right," Goodison insisted, and repeated: "It's a parallel case."

"I wish I knew what you were talking about."

"I just want cleaning up," Goodison said. "It wouldn't do for Rose to see me like this."

He had not noticed that they had reached 32nd Street, and were hurtling down town, their siren wailing. They crossed over lights when they were red, and two people leapt out of the way. There were lighted signs on now, although it was still daylight. They were on Madison, and passed the Rapelli Gallery. Telisa stared at it, tight-lipped, but did not speak. There were patrolmen on duty on both sides of the road, after this there would be police everywhere, but Pillitzer, who could have talked, was dead.

Why had he taken that risk?

If he had waited and let them go into the picture store, he might have got away. He would have had a chance, but the way he had acted, he hadn't a chance. Why do it? Why throw that fire bomb? Why destroy the pictures here, as they had been destroyed in London? How had he come by the bomb?

How long had he been here ?

Was Telisa Rapelli lying?

She was so touchy about her father that it looked like the great passion of her life.

Goodison was not consciously thinking; the thoughts were taking hold of him, giving a few moments of great clarity. Telisa flared up in anger whenever her father was named. She had divorced Jeremy Clint, and preferred to live at home with her father, but she admitted that she loved Clint. She had fought against naming him. Did she *know* he was the killer? Was her love so strong that she could protect him?

Did she know where he was?

Where was he? In London, England, or New York? A man couldn't be in two places at once, remember.

Evidence had been burned to ashes in London. Evidence had been burned to ashes here. Michael Ashley had been lucky to escape with his life; in almost identical circumstances, Telisa had been, too.

Two lots of evidence gone; two suspects made to look like lucky victims.

Clarity?

He was as clear as the Mississippi in early spring. He couldn't think. His lucidity was like the false sobriety of a drunk.

They reached Headquarters.

"Say, you ought to be hospitalized," said a sergeant who opened the car door. "Not so fast, you'll fall down." There was no pretence in his concern, and Goodison looked as if he couldn't stand without help.

"Just clean me up," Goodison said, "and look after the lady." He felt as if he were just a little drunk. "Hank Jensen in?"

"No."

"Who is?"

"Captain Tolliffer is."

Goodison said: "Well, I don't seem to have any choice." He reached the elevators, the sergeant, a detective and a woman clerk with them, got out at the Bureau floor, and then went along to Tollifer's office. Suddenly there was Tollifer, holding his arm, helping him into a chair.

"Just tell me what you want to, and I'D see that you're cleaned up," he said.

Goodison nearly giggled.

"Cleaned up is right, Captain. I don't want any misunderstanding. Miss Rapelli saved my life. She tried to save the

others. She'll tell you all about it. She took us to the store in Long Island City, and —"

"I know what happened." Tollifer wasn't sharp. "We are all grateful to Miss Rapelli."

"You could show it by conceding the fact that my father was an honest man," Telisa said, but the sting was out of her voice. She looked tired, Goodison thought. He noticed that her hair was singed at one side, and her coat was burnt, and there was an angry-looking blister on her right hand.

"Miss Rapelli, the indications are that faked pictures were being shipped to New York from London, and sold by you and your father as genuine. If you and your father didn't know that, who would?"

"We didn't know."

"We've held Dario, your gallery manager, and Smart, the warehouse manager, for questioning," Tollifer said. That was news to Goodison. "Have you any reason to believe either of them was involved?"

"They've worked for us for twenty years," said Telisa. "It isn't conceivable."

"Your father was killed. Pillitzer died. A famous art dealer and a sergeant of this bureau were killed. No one dreamed it up. Miss Rapelli. . . ."

"Cappen," Goodison interrupted. It was a deviation from the formal 'Captain' which he would not have permitted himself with Tollifer when he was feeling normal. He spoke loudly and clearly. "The remarkable feature of this case is that it runs parallel, here and in London. As if operated to a pattern. First, the murder and the slashing. Then the fire, and the destruction of faked pictures. . . ."

Telisa broke in sharply: "There was a quarter of a million dollars worth of goods in that store alone, maybe twice as much."

"Wow! Which insurance company?"

“There are three.”

“Spreading the loss,” said Goodison with great care. He stood up slowly, holding onto the desk. “Cappen, I need cleaning up. I’m dead beat. This case has me licked. I get a feeling that the solution is so obvious that only a blind man could miss it, and I’m the blind man. You’ve a fresh mind, a clear mind. Can you see what I’ve missed?”

Tollifer made a rare admission.

“No,” he said. “Maybe you’ll see clearer when you’ve had some rest. Right now I’m going to send you home.” He pressed a bellpush for a messenger.

“So he can’t see it,” Goodison thought. “He doesn’t know the old man was nearly blind. And if Rapelli didn’t know about those fakes, Telisa must have. Only one of them would examine the pictures, the other would rely on a report. So only one had to know about the fakes. It was Telisa. Old Rapelli found out, and died. So we’ve got to let Clint find her, talk to her, see what happens —”

It was all so vivid, until his mind clouded, as with pain.

He felt like fainting, and Telisa Rapelli was looking at him.

Mockingly?

Or with compassion?

Tollifer was questioning her again.

“If I tell him about the old man will I get anywhere?” Goodison asked himself, hazily. “How about finishing this job myself?”

16

Facts?

"DID YOU KNOW Pillitzer was in the warehouse?" Tollifer asked Telisa coldly. Goodison had been taken out, and they were alone in the office.

"I had no idea," she answered.

"Did you allow your ex-husband to have a key?"

"Yes."

"Did you know he knew Pillitzer?"

"Yes. But I don't believe my — ray ex-husband knew anything about the murder. He must have been used as —" She broke off.

"A fall guy," Tollifer said, icily. "You've got a mind." His cold anger was something to see and hear. "You've used it to keep killers safe. Clint's in New York. We want him before he can do any more harm. We want to know the places where he might be, and we want to know right now."

Telisa moistened her lips.

"Don't get the idea that you can fool us any more," Tollifer said. "We know now that Michael Ashley flew over to New York to warn you about Clint, to tell you that Margaret Roy had found out about the frauds, and was killed to prevent her from talking. Why didn't you tell us that?"

She was staring out of the window.

"Why didn't you?" Tollifer roared.

"I didn't want to believe it," she said wearily. It was remarkable that her cheeks could be so pale, yet she still looked beautiful because of her colouring. Her eyes were fever-bright, her hair a shimmering bronze; she looked more like a painting than a human being.

"Have you seen Clint lately?" Tollifer demanded.

"Two months ago."

“You’re lying. You’ve seen him this week.”

Two months ago,” Telisa repeated.

“In New York?”

“Yes.”

“Where?”

“He always rents a service apartment on West Seventy-seventh Street,” Telisa answered, and each word seemed forced out of her. “He’s been going there on and off for years. That’s the only place I know.”

“Miss Rapelli,” Tollifer said, still bleak and hostile, “you are at liberty to return to your apartment. You will be followed. My advice to you is to make sure you do not evade my detectives. If I were you, I would stay in your apartment until we have picked up your ex-husband. You can give evidence against him, you can send him to the electric chair.”

She didn’t speak.

“And keep your doors locked,” Tollifer said.

***

Hank Jensen followed Telisa.

Two cars filled with police arrived at the apartment house on West 77th Street. It was newly painted: if one looked out of a front window one could see the Hudson, and the Hudson had never looked more blue. Inside, the house was spotlessly clean. A middle-aged German woman with a broken accent did not deny that an Englishman answering Clint’s description often stayed here, using the name of Meyer.

“But this time he comes not,” she asserted.

“If you hear from him, if you have a call from him, make sure you call Headquarters,” a lieutenant ordered.

“I don’t want to put Mr Meyer in trouble.”

“You won’t get him in trouble, he couldn’t get in any deeper. You might make a lot of trouble for yourself.”

"If I hear from him, I will call you," the landlady promised.

***

Goodison said mechanically: "Sure, I feel fine, don't bother me," as he stood upright, just outside Headquarters. He went down to the sidewalk and along to his car, walking with extreme caution but refusing help. He had only been burned slightly on the back of the left hand, and there was a soreness at his neck and down his left side: like bad sunburn. His eyes kept watering, and he didn't feel good. He stood at the side of his car, and looked at the nearly deserted road. A yellow cab came along, empty, and he put up his hand.

"You know the Rapelli Gallery, on Madison?"

"Do I know the Rockefeller Centre?"

"Okay," Goodison said. He got in. It was three-quarters of an hour since Telisa Rapelli had left, with Jensen after her. In many ways they had been the worst three-quarters of an hour of Goodison's life. He felt a little better now that he was going to the gallery. It was after seven o'clock, and there was little traffic down town, not much even in mid-Town on Madison. The heat drove people off the streets the moment they could go. Inside the air conditioned homes, hotels and shops there were still crowds, inside the bars drinks were being consumed to cool the stifled millions. But traffic was light. Goodison leaned back, his eyes half-closed; he had decided not to drive because of the way they kept smarting and watering. Not that it mattered. He ought to be dead. He had Telisa Rapelli to thank that he wasn't.

There ought to be a way to repay a debt of that kind.

Prove she conspired with her husband, for example — to cash in on her father's fortune, to cash in on a big insurance —

There were no sightseers outside the gallery, the sensation was over there now. There was not even a newspaperman. There were three cops, looking hot and lethargic, but they straightened up

when Goodison appeared. The gallery was closed: so was the door leading to the apartment. Across the road was a small drug store, the kind that was still independent. Goodison went across. Two couples were sitting at the far end of the counter, drinking sodas. Jensen was eating what looked like a bacon and egg sandwich. Goodison discovered that he felt hungry.

"What'll you have?" a young counter jerk asked.

"What's good enough for my friend is good enough for me," Goodison said. "Coffee first."

"Coffee first, yessir."

Goodison sat next to Jensen, who hadn't looked at him, but now stared at his reflection in the mirror. Jensen's fair hair and complexion were fresh and healthy; Goodison looked as if he had been to Miami Beach, but no one had told him about the dangers of sunburn. From here, Jensen could see the entrance and the front window of Telisa Rapelli's apartment.

"I wondered how long you'd be," Jensen said.

"I was longer than I meant to be," Goodison responded. "She home?"

"She's home."

"Alone?"

"Who'd you expect?"

"Clint," Goodison answered. "Hank, I've been sick, remember? Maybe that's why I didn't make sure a microphone was planted in the gallery and the flat, to pick up anything she says on the telephone, or to visitors."

Jensen grinned.

"We don't have to like Captain Tollifer," he remarked, "but we have to admit he knows his job."

"That mike there?" Goodison felt sharp relief.

"While you were having fun at the warehouse, the other cops in New York kept on the job," Jensen said. "They even watched this

place. Telisa had a visitor. He let himself in with a key —"

"Clint!" cried Goodison.

"Tell the world," Jensen cried.

"But Telisa —"

"She's been inside there for ten minutes," Jensen told him. "I had instructions from the Captain — let them talk, and pick Clint up as he leaves. You approve?"

"My God," Goodison said, chokily. "I didn't think that cold fish would take a risk. If Telisa gets hurt —"

"He knows the apartment's surrounded, Clint would never hurt her now," Jensen said. "Who called it a risk?"

"I call it a risk." Goodison stared across Madison, and the coffee arrived. Goodison poured sugar into it, and stirred slowly. "I asked myself a question," he said. "Is it true or isn't it true that Scotland Yard reported Ashley had flown over the Atlantic under different names, and if so, why? Is it true the last report from London says Clint has definitely been in England all week, so he didn't kill Rapelli."

"It's true."

Goodison drank coffee and stared across Madison, as if he couldn't wait for Clint to appear. Two cops were near the door, and Hank was right about the risk. But. . .

Goodison made himself say: "Did Ashley kill old Rapelli? Or was Pillitzer paid to do that?"

"My money is on Pillitzer, the way he behaved means he knew he would be held on a murder rap."

"Right."

"Even if Ashley doesn't have to be a killer, he can still be mixed up in the faked pictures racket," Jensen added.

Goodison sipped his coffee again; it was hot, and scalded lips which were already sore. He grimaced, dabbed them carefully, and couldn't keep his gaze off the window. Suddenly he saw one of the

cops jerk his head up, saw another snatch out his gun.

He was off his stool and at the door before Jensen moved.

He yanked the door open.

He heard the crunching sound of breaking glass; the snap of a small bore automatic, both from the first floor window of the Rapelli apartment, above the gallery. He raced across the road, Jensen hard behind him. He heard another shot, and more glass break. The nearest cop was battering at the door of the apartment.

The woman inside screamed.

Cars stopped, people on the sidewalk spun round, a couple dodged into a doorway. Goodison heard the cop battering at the door and knew that he could not smash it down in time: no one could. There was a sound of struggling. Goodison heard a crash. He saw a hold that he could take at the win-dow, and hitched himself up and then hauled himself higher. The strain at his shoulders was almost unbearable.

He heard Jensen call: “Okay, stand on me.” He squinted down and saw Jensen’s broad shoulders immediately beneath him, and stood on them; that took him almost head high to the window. He could hear struggling inside the room, then a crash as if a chair or a table had fallen.

He heard another shot.

He clutched at stonework, and hauled himself up, and saw into the room.

Telisa Rapelli was at the door, clutching desperately at the handle, looking over her shoulder as if she feared that death would catch her before the door opened. She needn’t worry. Goodison knew she needn’t, because he had seen death often enough. A man, a big, handsome man, was sliding down the wall alongside the door. His head lolled forward, but Goodison could see the way his eyes glazed. He could also see the blood pumping out of the wound in the neck. The woman was sobbing. Her hair looked as if she had

been caught in a hurricane, the neck of her dress was torn, and her hands were at her throat.

A crash from downstairs told him that the street door was down at last. He didn't need to try to climb, just called to Telisa:

"You can relax."

She said gaspingly: "He was waiting here for me. He wanted money. When I wouldn't give it to him he started to strangle me." She could not go on, her breathing was so bad, and now he could see red marks at her throat, and a scratch which bled slightly. At last she managed to finish: "I — I shot him. I bad to shoot him. I had to shoot."

"You shot him good," Goodison said, and then the door behind Telisa opened, and a cop ran in, with Jensen just behind.That was when Goodison saw that the telephone had been smashed, and the microphones broken into many pieces.

There was no record of what had been said.

Was there any way of proving who had made sure of what.

Part V

LONDON AND NEW YORK
FINAL PHASE

17

Two Aspects

"MR WEST?"

"Speaking."

"Cable in from New York, sir, I've just decoded it."

"Read it, please."

"Yes, sir." There was a pause, while Roger picked up a pencil and Turnbull, who now had the desk where Naylor's CI had been and was reading a newspaper report of the murder of Gossen and the hunt for Jeremy Clint, looked up, his eyes were sharp and burnished-looking. "New York?" he asked. "Yes."

"If they've got Clint, are we going to ask for extradition?"

"Not if I can help it . . . Yes, I'm ready." Roger wrote swiftly and he repeated the cable as it was read out to him.

POLICE HEADQUARTERS NEW YORK CITY TO CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION DEPARTMENT NEW SCOTLAND YARD LONDON JEREMY CLINT SHOT TODAY IN STRUGGLE WITH TELISA RAPELLI STOP PRELIMINARY INDICATIONS CONFIRM FAKED PICTURES SOLD BY RAPELLIS CHECKING STOP ANYONE ELSE YOU'D LIKE US TO PICK UP MESSAGE ENDS

Turnbull's grin had an edge to it.

"They don't even get him alive."

"They got him."

"We told them all about him."

"I don't care whether they got him or we did," Roger said. "All I want to know is whether anyone else was in this job with him — whether anyone else is still laughing at us."

"Telisa?"

“Supposing we hadn’t got on to Clint, what would the situation be?” Roger countered.

“We’d be looking for more evidence against Michael Ashley.”

“That’s right. And we would be wondering even more whether Telisa Rapelli was working with Ashley — whether she connived at her father’s murder because Rapelli found out that she was knowingly selling fakes. There was the fire in New York, and she was lucky to get out alive. Her husband turned up at her apartment and was shot and killed in a struggle. Why? Because he was going to kill her, or because he could implicate her? Is inheritance the real motive, and the fakes a blind?”

Turnbull stared at him, almost ludicrously.

“Are you on to that, too?”

“Why the devil don’t you stop keeping ideas to yourself — two heads are still better than one,” Roger said, but before Turnbull could comment, a telephone bell rang. Roger lifted the receiver.

“West here.”

“There’s another cable from New York, sir, signed by Mr Goodison. It’s been decoded.”

“Read it out to me, will you?”

“Yes, sir. Quote please check all Telisa Rapelli’s London associates and possible relations for inheritance motive urgent Goodison, end quote, sir.”

“Thanks,” Roger grunted. He rang off, and repeated the gist of the message to Turnbull.

Turnbull said almost unbelievingly:

“Do you and Goodison have an affinity? That’s practically what you’re saying.”

“It’s simply a study of the same evidence,” Roger reasoned. “Rapelli was only sixty-odd, and might have lived twenty years. He was worth a million dollars, and the insurance on the stock burnt in New York was another quarter of a million. That’s some

inheritance, and it's Telisa Rapelli's."

"Shared by whom?" Turnbull asked softly.

"We have to find out, if it's someone on our side. There's a cousin who lived —"

"The only relation we can trace this side died a year ago," Turnbull replied. "That's in one of my reports. Ashley was once engaged to Telisa —"

"Hardy gone?" Roger interrupted.

"Saw him leave myself."

"Good." Roger lifted the telephone and said: "I want a call to Lieutenant Goodison, New York Police. Yes, Goodison in person . . . If he's not at his office, try him at his home, you have the number . . . I don't care how long the delay is, I'll wait.

He rang off.

"You're still ahead of me," Turnbull conceded.

"I'm probably ahead of myself," Roger answered. "We began with Margaret's murder and the attack on Vanity. We went on to Michael Ashley and James Wickham rushing their cousin Vanity out of the way. We know she was frightened. We know she's given us some help, and offered more. We know she suspects Wickham — that stood out. We know we're dealing with ruthless killers, and that she might be next in line."

Turnbull said: "I'd hate to see her throat cut or her face slashed. How do you plan to save her?"

"We've got to get results in a hurry," Roger said, "and I can see only one way. Use Vanity Roy to find out which of her cousins is involved."

"That's the answer," Turnbull agreed, almost eagerly. "But why talk to Goodison about that? It's a hell of a risk, but it's our risk."

"If Goodison's the man I think he is, he'll take a chance," Roger said confidently. "He'll have a cable sent in the code that the

Old World Gallery uses—we've got their cypher book. The cable is going to tell both cousins that Vanity knows all the truth, and is going to talk. If they're in it together, they'll get together and plot how to deal with Vanity. If only one of the men goes to her, then he's going to kill or else to confer."

Turnbull said: "Suppose he's going to kill, what happens if he succeeds?"

"We don't let him," Roger said.

"We hope," said Turnbull, tersely; but his eyes were glittering with excitement.

***

Out of the window of his front room, Goodison could just see the sun sparkling on the cars streaming along the parkway, and shimmering on the Hudson. He hardly noticed that as he spoke into the telephone.

"Sure, Handsome, sure, I'll fix it somehow. No, I don't know how, but I'll fix it . . . Do you know that saying about two minds thinking alike? . . . What's that? . . ." He guffawed. "Sure, that's right, all great minds thinking alike! Well, maybe this fact will interest you. Michael Ashley and Telisa Rapelli used to walk out together . . . Rapelli hoped they'd get married. Sure, it's a fact, we've got it from three witnesses. And there's one other thing. If you had to describe Ashley and Wickham, how would you begin?"

After a pause, West answered: "They'd answer the same description, apart from colour of eyes and size—Wickham's bigger. What's on your mind?"

"We've heard from the apartment house where Clint stayed when in New York that he sometimes had an English visitor," Goodison reported, "and it could have been Ashley or Wickham. How about that?" He grinned. "I'll say it's your baby now," he said, and rang off.

He wiped his forehead as Rose came hurrying in.

“What is this you’re going to fix?” she demanded. “You’re not going to leave this apartment for another twenty-four hours even if that man West asks you to fly to London.”

“He won’t and I won’t. All I have to fix are some messages to London, honey. I don’t know whether to confide in Tollifer or not.” Goodison looked up at his Rose, and his eyes kindled at sight of her statuesque beauty. “Why do guys with wives like you have to work? I can imagine spending all the time there is lying around with you.”

“You watch what you’re saying. Ivan, I don’t often interfere with your business, but. . . .”

“Hon, you certainly don’t.”

“I’m interfering now.”

“Get it over with.”

“Don’t do anything on this case without consulting Captain Tollifer. If you made a mistake, you might be demoted. I don’t want to have to live the second half of my life on a sergeant’s pay.”

Goodison took her hands. “I guess you’re right, but if Tollifer says no, I’m going to be in real trouble,” he said. “You go and make supper while I talk to him.”

“I’m going to stand here and listen.”

Goodison sighed.

Tollifer was still at the office. Goodison could not even guess his reaction from anything he said at first, and before the conversation was a minute old, he was feeling hot and cold. Rose was watching, hands on her fine hips, as if the Amazon in her was ready to attack.

Then Tollifer said:

“You’d better have a cable expert phrase those cables, if you have to use the private code. Don’t waste any time.”

He rang off.

“You know,” Goodison said, marvelling, “there are times when I think that guy’s real human, and you’re a wife who can be right.”

He stood up.

“Where are you going?”

“Is it okay by you if I just look out of the window in the general direction of Madison?” asked Goodison. “I’m wondering what’s going on in our Telisa’s mind, and whether she thinks she’s getting away with anything.”

“Did it ever occur to you,” said Rose, “that you might be the reason she thinks she’s getting away with anything.”

“Everything occurs to me.”

“And everything happens to you,” Rose said, “but at least it can’t happen to you in London. If there’s trouble in London, your friend West will get it.”

“Take it from me he knows how bad it might be,” Goodison said, and the smile died out of his eye:.

18

The Killer

AT HALF-PAST eight next morning, in Roger West's small house in Bell Street, Chelsea, the telephone bell rang. Martin, called Scoopy, his elder boy was in the back garden mending his bicycle pump. Richard, the younger, was upstairs snatching five minutes practice at his flute. Roger was in the bathroom, half-shaved. Janet, his wife, was cooking breakfast, and bacon had just gone sizzling into the pan.

"Damn the thing," she said, and heard the plaintive note of the flute, saw Scoopy pretending not to have heard, pushed the pan off the gas, and hurried across to the telephone extension on the other side of the kitchen. "Mrs West speaking."

"Handsome in, Mrs West?" asked Turnbull.

"He's been up for an hour," Janet said tartly: in fact Roger had been up for fifteen minutes. "Can't you let him have his breakfast in peace?"

"Who is it?" That was Roger, calling down.

"No, ma'am, I just ca-an't," Turnbull declared, in well-simulated Texan.

"I'll call him," Janet said, and raised her voice: "It's Turnbull!" She put the receiver down so that it clattered, and hurried back to the gas stove. Roger came in, lather drying on one side of his face, spoke for a few minutes, and rang off.

"Smells good," he said. "Five minutes."

"You'll be ten."

"Bit tart, aren't you? What've I done?"

"I can't *stand* Turnbull, these days," Janet said. "What did he want?"

"Those cables are in from New York," Roger told her. "Turnbull personally checked, after arranging for Wickham,

Ashley and Vanity Roy to be double watched. I imagine he was up half the night."

"That's a habit he caught from you."

Roger grinned and blew her a kiss.

Martin called Scoopy came in, his hands black with mud and oil.

"Scoopy, your hands!"

"Soon get that off," Scoopy said, and made a mock attack on Janet's apron, making her dodge away. "Breakfast nearly ready?"

"It'll be ready before you are."

"Okay, I'll be quick, and someone's got to stop old Fish from making that noise." The lad swung towards the door.

"Scoopy!"

He stopped. "Yes, mum?"

"Wash those hands at the kitchen sink, not in the bathroom."

"Okay, mum," said Scoopy cheerfully, and danced a jig as he passed her, sniffing with his head high in the air. Janet found herself laughing. Water splashed and the white porcelain of the sink became black and sticky. "Can I use some of that stuff that gets grease off?" Scoopy asked, and opened the door under the sink.

Richard stopped playing and came sauntering in, then sneezed twice in succession.

"Go into the garden for five minutes," Janet said, "it may help to clear your nose. Isn't your catarrh *ever* going to get any better?"

"Speck so, one day," Richard said, philosophically, and sneezed again. "Sorry." He strolled out. Scoopy washed vigorously, eyeing his mother from time to time, and he didn't speak again until he had dried himself on a brightly coloured kitchen towel.

"I say, mum. . . ."

"Put the chairs round, and make sure everything's on the table, Scoop."

"Okay. Mum, are you worried about Dad?"

"Of course I'm not."

"I'll bet you are," insisted Scoopy. "Wasn't that chap Clint who was killed in New York the right one."

"You'd better ask your father."

"Not necessarily the only right one," Roger said, arriving quietly. He winked at Scoopy, winked again at Richard, who came hurrying in, eager to hear everything that was going on. "With luck, we'll see the end of the case today."

"If you're not careful, we'll also see the end of you," Janet said.

Richard studied her with his eyes huge and rounded, Scoopy took his breakfast from the stove and sat down, but didn't eat immediately. Roger put his arm round Janet's shoulder, and said quietly:

"You worry too much. It's one thing to kill helpless victims like Margaret Roy, it's another altogether to try rough stuff with a policeman."

"They killed a policeman in New York, didn't they? Yet New York police have guns, and you don't even carry a stick."

There was a long pause. Then Richard gulped, beamed, and turned bold eyes on to his father.

"Dad," he said with an air of great unconcern, "don't they call New York policemen cops?"

Even Janet laughed.

But she wasn't laughing or smiling when Roger drove off for the Yard. At least the boys were already on their way to school, and could not see her expression. They would not know how frightened she was; and nor would Roger. . . .

Roger felt keyed-up, but would have felt far worse had he known that Turnbull was talking to Vanity Roy while he,

Roger, was driving to the Yard.

***

Vanity was looking strained and anxious, and seemed almost glad to see Turnbull. He stood towering over her, as handsome as he was massive, and obviously very intent. He did not waste a moment in preliminaries, but demanded: “Still ready to help us?”

“I’ll do anything, as I promised Mr West,” Vanity answered.

“He told me, so here’s what to do. One or both of your cousins will get in touch with you this morning. They’ll want to meet you, and you’re to agree to go to Wickham’s studio for the meeting. That clear?”

“Perfectly.” Vanity ignored his brusqueness.

“You’re to say that before she died Margaret told you something which you’ve kept to yourself; that she knew that either Michael Ashley or James Wickham was plotting with Clint to sell fakes to the Rapelli Gallery. She didn’t know which one. Got that?”

Vanity said quietly: “Yes.”

“Then you’re to say that you know who it is. If Michael Ashley comes — it’s Ashley. Accuse him. If its Wickham — accuse him.”

Vanity began: “But —”

“You needn’t worry, we’ll have the place thick with our men,” Turnbull promised her. “Still quite clear?”

“I don’t see how it will help,” Vanity said.

“You soon will,” said Turnbull, brusquely. “First, say you know it’s him: then say you won’t tell us, all you want is a share in the business. You’ve just got to make him believe that — and make him talk. There’ll be men within earshot, and a tape-recorder laid on. You just have to make him talk, that’s all.”

“I’ll try,” Vanity promised, “but —”

“And don’t say a word about this to anyone,” Turnbull warned. “West will know you’re helping, but he won’t refer to the subject. Just do what I say.”

“Supposing whoever comes won’t talk? Supposing neither of them is guilty?”

“Then neither will come,” Turnbull said. “But one will, and you’re as sure of it as I am.”

She didn’t answer.

That was as good as saying ‘yes’.

***

It was half-past ten.

Roger was in an ordinary-looking private car, round the corner from the mews where Vanity Roy lived. He had a radio telephone attached, but it was underneath the seat, and all he held in his hand was a miniature microphone which served as the speaker. Along the graceful Mayfair street, cars streamed and people hurried. In half a dozen of the cars, Yard men waited. At the garage in the mews there were two men from the Yard, one as a mechanic, one as a chauffeur, washing down a Rolls Royce. On the roof of a house overlooking the mews two men were stationed. It was warm but overcast, and there seemed a little spittle of rain in the air.

The radio crackled.

“You there, Mr West?” That was Turnbull, being very proper.

“Speaking.”

“Nothing to report,” Turnbull announced. “No telephone messages received at any of the three homes. Wickham and Ashley have not conferred, haven’t called Vanity and haven’t left their flats.”

“Someone will.”

“Anything your end?”

“Not yet.”

“Think our man smelt a rat?” Turnbull asked. “Half a mo’ — hold on!”

The pause which followed seemed endless. Then Turnbull spoke again.

“Wickham’s just left the studio in a taxi.”

"Taxi?" barked Roger.

"Black, Beardmore, 1956, looks very new," Turnbull said, excitement fierce in his voice. "Hold on, there's another flash in . . . You still there? . . . Ashley has just called Vanity Roy, they're talking now, we couldn't get it much quicker than that. Hold on!" Roger sat still and tense, watching the street, seeing a man turn into the mews, feeling the sense of danger acutely. The physical risks worried Janet; the risks for Vanity Roy worried him. If one or the other of her cousins tried to kill her, he could be stopped; but supposing a third-party was used, someone of whom the police knew nothing? One shot would be enough.

Turnbull came on again. "He's asked her to meet him at the Gallery office in Bond Street, at half-past eleven."

Roger hesitated. He could go to Bond Street, and wait for the girl, and for Michael Ashley to arrive before or after her. Or he could wait here, ready to follow the girl and make sure that nothing happened to her on the way. If Ashley were the killer, there was no telling how deep his cunning lay.

"Any instructions?" Turnbull asked.

Roger said: "Yes. Leave your end to Micklewright. Go to the Gallery office, get in and make yourself scarce. Have all patrols concentrated on the roads from here to New Bond Street; all radio cars to report when Vanity Roy passes. I'll follow her. Tell Anderson to keep in constant touch with me."

"Don't follow her!" Turnbull bellowed. "You're bound to be seen, you'll only give the game away."

Roger said: "I'll chance that."

"But —" began Turnbull, and then his tone changed. "Half a mo', Hardy wants to talk to you." There was a pause, before he spoke again. "He wants you to report here right away," he said with curious emphasis, as if he were over-anxious. "Too bad."

Roger said: "Thanks," and flicked off, but didn't move.

Turnbull had tried to stop him from following the girl, and there must be a very good reason for that.

"Mr West?" a man said over the air.

"West speaking."

"Mr James Wickham has just arrived at Scotland Yard, and asked for you. He wishes to see you urgently."

It was impossible even to guess what would come next.

Roger said: "Tell him I'm out, but that Chief Inspector Micklewright will see him. Ask Mr Micklewright to see him at once, and report the reasons for his call."

"Yes, sir."

"And ask Mr Hardy to have a word with me."

"He's with the Assistant Commissioner, sir."

"Since when?" Roger snapped.

"For the last half-hour, at least," the Information Room man said.

So there was no doubt that Turnbull had lied.

***

Roger tossed a second, half-smoked cigarette out of the window, and saw a signal from the chauffeur at the front of the Rolls Royce. Here was Vanity Roy. Roger started the engine. The girl came walking briskly towards the entrance and he thought again that she was so near perfection that it was easy to forget she was so small. Her figure was lovely, her legs beautiful, her carriage full of grace. She didn't look at him, but along the road, as if she wanted a taxi. She turned left, towards Park Lane; she would get a cab there quickly enough. She walked more quickly than one expected, and was drawing further away. A police car at the corner was waiting, two men in it also watching her, but there was that sense of danger, the sense that Michael Ashley or someone unknown might attack her here — or round the corner — or in the next street.

She passed the police car.

The radio crackled.

". . . Michael Ashley has got into a taxi and instructed the driver to take him to Victoria Station."

"Thanks." That was near Chelsea, not far from the studio; nowhere near the Gallery office.

What the hell was Turnbull playing at?

A personal triumph, of course; the bloody fool.

Roger turned the corner. The girl was raising a hand at a taxi which pulled across the road towards her. She got in and closed the door, and the taxi started off towards Hyde Park Corner. It was now nearly certain that the crisis would be at the studio, but all the concentration of the Yard's men was at New Bond Street. To countermand that now might cause confusion, and would certainly call for an explanation, and the girl might be going a long way to try to shake off anyone who followed her.

The radio. . . .

". . . Ashley was followed to Victoria, but evaded the two detectives following him."

God!

"See that every approach to 17, View Crescent, Chelsea, is double-watched," Roger ordered. That at least he could do.

He was approaching Victoria, at the end of Buckingham Palace Road. It was useless to blame the men following Ashley, any man could get away from a tailer if he wanted to. Obviously he was going straight to Chelsea.

If Turnbull had lied in the hope of a great personal triumph, he would be at the studio, to hear what Ashley and the girl had to say. He would have to have a cast-iron case to save himself from the consequences of the deception.

They turned off the King's road towards the river, with the taxi rattling along. It turned into sight of the Thames, which looked

grey and turgid, then swung into the crescent. As he pulled up, Roger saw it stop. Vanity Roy got out and paid the driver off.

The radio came: ". . . Ashley has been seen climbing the fire-escape of 14, View Crescent."

That meant that he was going over the roof to No. 17.

"How many of our men are in the crescent?" Roger demanded.

"Four, sir."

Plus Turnbull, inside?

The radio sounded again, as if impatient. "Mr West?"

"West speaking."

"James Wickham came here to report that he had received a cable from Miss Rapelli in New York, which he did not understand. He brought the cable with him. Chief Inspector Micklewright has asked him to wait."

"That's right," Roger said. "I'll call back."

The girl was at the front door of the house, letting herself in with a key. She disappeared, and closed the door behind her. If Roger tried to talk to the Yard men, she would get too far ahead. Roger took out a pass key, gave the girl time to reach a landing ahead of him, opened the door and stepped in after her. He could hear her walking up.

Would Ashley kill her, in Wickham's flat?

Kill her here, pretend to find her dead, and blame Wickham? *Frame* Wickham? That was probably what he hoped to do.

In any case, Turnbull was inside.

But supposing he wasn't?

That thought was driven out of Roger's mind when another door opened.

19

Reason for Fear

TURNBULL HEARD a man's footsteps on the fire-escape, and stepped into the studio. He had prepared a hiding place in a corner, behind easels and canvases, none of which had been disturbed; here were the slashed likenesses of Margaret Roy. Turnbull stood in the corner, ready to duck out of sight. A man entered the flat by the fire-escape door, closed the door sharply, and then seemed to stand still for a moment, as if he were looking round.

Then he stepped to this room; and to the studio archway.

Turnbull made no sound as he ducked.

The newcomer was Ashley.

The painter stepped further into the room, and looked round, as if expecting to see something here. He moved to the window and stared out over the rooftops. Turnbull was safe unless the other man decided to move these canvases.

There were more footsteps outside; a girl's.

Turnbull could not see Ashley's face clearly, but he had an impression of a smile. Ashley disappeared as the outer door opened and Vanity Roy came in with her key.

Turnbull straightened up, but was poised to bob down again if the others came in here, or if West came.

"Mike, what's all the mystery about?" Vanity asked, and Turnbull heard what he had only seen before: the fear which was deep in her.

"Hallo, Van," Ashley greeted, and there was a curiously flat note in his voice. "Thanks for coming so quickly. You're looking a bit pale."

"You asked me to hurry."

"I didn't ask you to kill yourself," Ashley said, and suddenly he laughed; then Turnbull heard a movement and a sharp click.

“Why are you locking and bolting the door?” Vanity demanded, and fear became livid in her voice. “Michael! What’s the matter with you, have you gone crazy?”

Turnbull thought: “Well, I’ve got the answer we’ve been waiting for.” His teeth were bared in a grin.

“Not crazy, Vanity darling,” Ashley answered. “I’m very, very sane. Don’t move to the door, it won’t make any difference. Tell me, how long have you known?”

Turnbull left his hiding place, very stealthily, and went towards the archway. No one else could come, no one could spoil his triumph.

He could hear Vanity’s laboured breathing.

She said: “Mike, I’ve known for a long time, Margaret told me, but — but I’m not like Margaret.”

Good girl! Turnbull exulted.

“What do you mean?” Ashley demanded.

“I’m not like Margaret, I — I don’t care what you do, I’m only interested in what I can get out of it. Mike, *I’d* never talk to the police.”

“Good God!” Ashley gasped.

“If I’d wanted to, I would have told them days ago,” Vanity said, desperately. “I only want to help — Mike, put that gun away!” She was almost at screaming point. “Put it away!”

***

Roger was at the door, thinking: “If Turnbull isn’t inside, Ashley will kill her.” A detective officer from the street had seen and followed Roger, so he wasn’t alone, but he felt helpless.

“Get an axe, so that we can break this door down,” he whispered. “And tell the men at the back to break in at the window.”

“Yes, sir.”

Roger heard the man move off, and then heard Ashley speak

again.

***

Ashley asked in a conversational way: “Did you really know I’d killed Maggie, Van?”

“I — I knew it must have been you or Jimmy.”

“You fooled me completely,” Ashley said. “I thought you’d hate her killer. But if you didn’t tell the police what she told you — by the way, what *did* she tell you?”

“About the fakes, and about her telephoning old Rapelli.”

“Well, well!” Ashley exclaimed. “You really had it under your hat? Did you know that I tried to kill you because Margaret told me you knew? If Jimmy hadn’t talked you into going down to the cottage, you wouldn’t have been alive today.”

She hardly noticed what he said about Margaret, she was so intent on reasoning with him until the police revealed themselves.

“Mike, I — I’d never have betrayed you or Jimmy,” she said hurriedly. “You ought to have known that.”

“Jimmy?” Ashley echoed, in a sharp voice. “Jimmy doesn’t know as much as you, he’s the innocent boy.”

“Then who — who was it?” Vanity asked. “Margaret said there were two. I thought —”

She broke off, unable to think of anything else to say, and terrified by the expression in Michael’s eyes. She felt sure that he knew she was lying, and believed that he would kill her.

He gave a queer, shrill laugh.

“Oh, there were two of us, Van — Clint and me. I’m surprised that Maggie didn’t make that clear. Clint began it all, only you didn’t know him as Clint, you knew him as Ordin, Maggie’s one-time boy friend.”

“Ordin!” Vanity exclaimed.

“That’s right,” Ashley said, and checked another laugh. “He thought he’d get us all where he wanted us, but Telisa and I had

plans for that gentleman. The swine nearly killed me, he nearly —"

"Mike, don't look at me like that!"

"Am I scaring you, Van?" Ashley asked. "All right, I'll put the gun away."

But he didn't.

There was a movement just beyond the archway. Vanity opened a mouth to scream a warning, but Ashley thrust her aside, and stepped forward.

Turnbull appeared, and gave a fierce grin.

Ashley shot him.

***

Vanity saw Turnbull flinch: saw the look of unbelief on his handsome face. He put a hand to his chest, and staggered. He did not make a sound. He seemed to try to throw himself forward at Michael, but before he reached Michael he collapsed; and she saw him sprawling there as she crouched against the wall.

***

Outside, Roger heard the shot, and while it was still echoing, he spun round to the man with the axe. As he grabbed and wielded it, Roger felt despair merging into terror.

Why wasn't Turnbull doing something?

The girl gasped: "Michael, no, Michael!"

***

There was the policeman, lying there as if dead, and there was Michael drawing very close to her, with an expression different from anything she had ever seen before, a kind of vicious hatred on his face. He was holding the gun towards her, only a yard away, but was stretching out his other arm, as if he wanted to touch her before he fired. She could not scream, could hardly breathe, but she dodged to one side and tried to run. He snatched at her with his left hand, caught her arm, and jerked her towards him. The glitter in his eyes seemed one of madness. She saw him thrust the gun closer

to her face. All she could see was the grey barrel, the muzzle, and death ready to speak from it. She tried to get away but could not, and she screamed.

Then came bedlam.

There was a thudding on the door; the crash of breaking glass; and a flutter of movement from Turnbull on the floor. He grabbed Ashley's ankle, although Vanity did not see him.

She only saw the muzzle of the gun waver, there was a roar of a shot, and blackness enveloped her.

She lost consciousness.

***

The door first sagged and then gave way, its one bolt torn from the door frame. Roger and the man with him staggered in as another detective, blood streaming from a cut in his cheek, reached the archway from the studio window. Turn- bull was on the floor. The girl was, too. Ashley was backing away, tight-lipped, covering Roger with the automatic, but seeing the other men and forced to realize that he could not get away.

"Drop that gun," Roger said, and went forward as if the automatic were a toy. "Go on, drop it." He was a yard away when the man with the cut cheek leapt at Ashley, and overpowered him; and as Roger took the gun away, more police streamed in. . . .

The girl did not seem to be injured, but Turnbull was bleeding from a bullet wound close to the heart, and he looked as if he might bleed to death.

"Pad that wound," Roger ordered a sergeant, "and make sure the ambulance is on the way." He felt a strange sense of relief mingled with cold fury which Turnbull's condition did not ease.

Then Turnbull said in a thick voice:

"Tape-recorder's on that bookcase. There's your evidence. I got there — first."

He lost consciousness before he could say another word.

***

"I can cover up for him, or I can have him kicked out," Roger thought. "What the hell am I to do?"

At heart, he knew; Turnbull as a policeman would never really make the grade.

But —

He might die, and solve the problem himself.

***

"We haven't got the i's dotted and the t's crossed yet," Roger said to Hardy, "but I think we've got most of it. The overall crime was fraud and smuggling, with Ashley, Clint and Telisa Rapelli the partners. Clint had an affair with Margaret Roy, who learned about the fakes, and he killed her. She tried to save herself by saying that Vanity Roy knew, so it would be useless to kill her. That put Vanity on the spot, but James Wickham, who knew nothing of what was happening, wanted to get her out of the way. Ashley helped him, but tried to kill her as soon as she returned to London. It was Ashley who slashed Wickham's paintings, to give the murder a psychopathic look."

Roger paused, but Hardy made no comment.

"There was a factor we couldn't hope to find quickly, and which made the confusion much worse. Clint and Ashley — the ex-husband and the ex-fiancé — were still bitter rivals for Telisa Rapelli, although they were partners in the fraud. Clint had the better mind, and did the organising. He sent Ashley to New York to see Telisa, and then had Pillitzer kill Rapelli — he'd been in New York a few days earlier, and Pillitzer knew exactly what to do. On a telephone call from Clint — there was a call to a New York number from Meyer's Warehouse while Ashley was on the aircraft — Pillitzer did exactly what he had been told.

"So Rapelli was killed in the same way as Margaret, and Ashley had the opportunity in both cases. It looked as if Ashley

would be perfectly framed. Everything was laid on to destroy the faked paintings by fire — and so destroy the evidence of the motive. Clint, knowing by then that he'd lost Telisa for good, sent for Ashley, at Gossen's. Ashley says that Clint fooled him by saying he was ready to clear Ashley, at a price. Instead, Ashley was nearly killed and the runner, Hill, murdered.

"After that, Clint had to kill Gossen — who could damn him, for Gossen was in the racket all the time — and then flew to New York. He went to see Telisa, to try to win her back. She killed him."

After a pause, Hardy said: "Where did Wickham come in?"

"He knew nothing at all about it," Roger answered. "He suspected Clint, but played dumb because his cousin had told him he'd been framed. There's a kind of stiff-necked loyalty about James Wickham."

Hardy looked very straightly into Roger's eyes.

"There's a stiff-necked loyalty about you, too," he said. "What really happened at Chelsea? Why was Turnbull there alone?"

"With luck, he'll be able to speak for himself," Roger answered. "Why not let him?"

Hardy: "I'll wait a week, that's all. Don't go and ruin your own future by protecting Turnbull's, Roger. He's a good detective but a bad policeman. I can't risk having bad policemen on the force."

Roger didn't speak.

***

Goodison, still with an arm in the sling, made the formal charge against Telisa Rapelli, while holding the warrant of arrest. Hank Jensen stood close to her, to make sure she made no attempt to injure herself. She listened impassively, and made no reply.

"You can tell me this," Goodison said. "What made my life worth saving in that warehouse fire?"

She did not answer; but the answer came to him. He would have been bound to doubt whether a guilty woman would have

saved him. She must have hoped that it would help to convince him, and so the police, of her innocence.

"Take her away," Goodison said.

They took her past the apartment where her father had been killed, across the apartment where she had killed Clint, and down the stairs; she moved like a queen, and did not speak or show any signs of emotion. Goodison watched as she was hustled into a police car, and then driven off through the crowd which had gathered, with a detective on either side of her.

Goodison went to his Mercury.

"Any personal comment for us?" a newspaperman called out.

"Sure have. I don't like humidity at eighty-nine."

"That right your friend Superintendent West disarmed a gunman with his bare hands?"

"It sounds right."

"You any opinion about the police carrying guns, Lootenant?"

"If I were in England maybe I wouldn't want one, but in New York I'd feel naked," Goodison answered. "That's all, fellas."

"Hold it, Lootenant, we want a picture."

Lights flashed.

"That right Ashley and Clint worked with Telisa Rapelli?" a man called.

"You wouldn't want me to say anything prejudicial to an arrested person's case, would you?" asked Goodison, straight- faced. "You can quote me as saying that I think the murderers began by hoping that they could make it look like a psycho job, but it didn't work out that way. Then they tried to destroy the evidence of faked pictures. Pillitzer was the fall guy on this side, Clint on the other side. That's all for today, folks."

"I've got news for you," a newspaperman called out.

"Later, Charley."

"West of Scotland Yard said you'd done a damned good job,"

the newspaperman said. “Aren’t you going to return the compliment?”

“Here and now,” Goodison said eagerly. “You can quote me. . .

***

On the following day Roger read the statement that Goodison had made to the Press. He was in his office, preparing all the documents and exhibits in the case for Ashley’s trial. He knew that Wickham and Vanity Roy were planning to get married; that Goodison was on top of the world, and that Turnbull had recovered consciousness. He could be visited that afternoon.

Roger went to the hospital by himself.

Turnbull looked pale and weak, and his eyes lacked their usual fire. But he managed a grin, and spoke before Roger.

“I’m told you haven’t made your report on me yet, Handsome. That true?”

“I prefer a man to speak for himself,” Roger said.

“Pity you don’t prefer a man to act for himself,” Turnbull said, with a flash of spirit. “But I’ll talk. You can tell the world I’m retiring from the Yard, I’ll work on my own in future. If you could fix it so that I’m allowed to resign —”

He broke off, hating to ask a favour.

“I’ll fix it,” Roger promised, and was really glad that he could.

On his way out, he saw Turnbull’s wife entering the hospital. He deliberately avoided her, but wasn’t surprised when Janet told him, weeks later, that the Turnbulls were going to make a fresh start.

THE END